

THE ARGOSY.

MARCH, 1882.

MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HISTORY OF THE AGATES.

ON that same Saturday evening Philip Connell and Frank set off to call on Miss Agate, to ask what she had done with the lawyers.

They found the clean, threadbare house the same as usual, but this time the two ladies were at home. Evelyn was in high spirits, and very gracious in manner when Frank was introduced to her. She was glad she had not seen him before. Here was one human being whose first impression of her would not be of a deserted child, but of a mysterious foundling.

"I am certain something will come of it," she said, interrupting Gertrude's narrative. "I felt sure of it from the lawyer's manner. He was so respectful to me. I noticed two or three strong-boxes with titled names on them as we were led through the office: Dewe and Creed must be a first-rate firm. Nobody without considerable means would employ them to make inquiries."

Her thoughts were of the rank and wealth that might possibly be within her grasp: she seemed to have no recollection of the sufferings and sins which must certainly have underlain her mysterious history, nor any longing for the kindred love of which she had been so long deprived.

"I don't like to see Evelyn too hopeful," said Miss Agate, gravely. "I want her to remember that, at the very last, the lawyer said all we had told him conveyed nothing to him personally, but that it should be faithfully reported."

"People don't choose all their words with an eye direct to truth," answered Evelyn. "There are certain conventional phrases which come in handily on occasions, and mean little or nothing: and I believe that was one."

"Heyday, young lady!" cried Philip, "where did you get so much knowledge of the world?"

"I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance for a long time, sir," she retorted, with an arch curtsy.

She was certainly a handsome young woman, with her regular features, clear complexion and rich chestnut hair. She was well-dressed too, in a fashionably cut velveteen robe, with stiff frills at the throat and wrists. And yet, as Frank looked at her, a strange expression of disfavour crept across his face. Her very beauty and elegance only reminded him of the barmaid at the luncheon rooms which Philip Connell frequented, and whose pert familiarity had been very objectionable to one accustomed to the kindly respectfulness of the Raven maid-servants. The veneer might be a little thicker and smother in Evelyn's case, but surely beneath lay the same coarse-grained nature, with all its vulgar self-appraisal and greed and falsity. Frank did not think these things: he only felt them—only reflected how different this girl was from that other girl he had met in the Ravenstoke lanes. It was one of the blessings of his simple nature that it had acute instincts.

"You might all leave me my hopes for a day or two, at any rate," she said, pouting. "Just because my sun seems peeping out, the clouds about me must begin to rain! Even our abigail, Mrs. Davies, has passed the day in a state of damp distress: which I am asked to believe arises solely from her fear of losing me! I believe she is always miserable, and is only glad of any excuse for letting it out."

"When you know poor Mary is so nervous and weak-minded," said Miss Agate, "you should have told her nothing till you were sure there was something to tell."

"Dear me," cried Evelyn, "I thought it was a good opportunity for letting her exercise her powers of dreams and signs and omens. And I was right too: she began directly we got in from the lawyer's office, telling me she must have fallen asleep over the kitchen fire, for she had had a dream."

"Did she relate it?" asked Philip.

"Oh yes," said Evelyn: "it ran that my people were discovered, and that, after all, nobody really belonged to me but my mother, and she was only a poor woman. And she said she distinctly saw me and my mother standing in front of each other in the dream, just as she and I were standing at that moment, and in her eagerness to see how I would act and behave, she awoke."

"Poor Mary Davies!" cried Miss Agate, "she has always been very fond of Evelyn. She was with me, you see, when I opened the door and found the baby on the step: we found her, as may be said, together. I never shall forget the state of excitement she went into: it was her way. And when once I had made up my mind to adopt the little girl, she seemed to think that, as our own child had

been stolen from our house already, there might be danger for this one, and mounted guard over it most assiduously. No wonder she has grown fond of Evelyn, and anxious almost to a mania for her welfare !”

“Ah, she is a faithful old retainer,” remarked Philip, carelessly, the subject not much interesting him. “Was she with you at the time of your great trial?”

“No ; not for some months after that. I had been inquiring at the shops for a young servant, and she presented herself. A timid, feckless thing, she seemed, poor and friendless, who would be glad to do anything for a bit of bread.”

“Like many another London girl,” put in Evelyn disdainfully.

“She was a country lass,” said Miss Agate. “I caught up an impression that she had been in some trouble or sorrow in her country birth-place, and had come away to London out of it. She came from Alstock, in Surrey.”

“That’s not far from Ravenstoke,” observed Frank, “though it’s in another county.”

“Did you never hear her history?” asked Philip.

“Never,” said Miss Agate. “And I have grown to doubt whether she has any history to tell. I do not find enough employment for her myself, but the other people in the house do, and so—here she has stayed. She has never, to my knowledge, received a visitor or a letter all these twenty years. Nor has she ever taken a holiday.”

“She looks merely a decent, doleful, affectionate, common-place woman,” observed Philip.

“Exactly so,” said Miss Agate, “and I have found her invaluable. My poor brother’s peculiar condition demands that I have some very faithful, obedient ally—inclined to submission and silence. The lodgers like her, too : and some of them have been here many years. I have had to let my rooms, you know, to eke out my small income.”

The confidences demanded by her morning interview with the lawyers seemed to have broken down Miss Agate’s accustomed reserve. Never before had Philip Connell heard her allude directly to the skeleton in her home—her brother.

“Does Mr. Agate really see nobody?” he asked, genuine sympathy mingling with his curiosity, “or is an exception made in favour of Mary Davies?”

“He sees literally nobody but me,” said Miss Agate with sad serenity. “I do all the work in his room, and take him the meals which Davies brings to his door. I don’t think he is unhappy. These are habits he formed directly he was released from confinement.”

“But how can he endure the awful monotony?” cried Philip.

“He seems quite absorbed in his classic authors,” returned Miss Agate. “They were always the delight of his life. He writes well, too, and editors are glad of anything from his pen. I have made his room very bright and pretty,” she continued after a pause. “It has

a long window opening on the garden, and I have had a strip walled off for his especial use. In summer time, when the leaves are thick, he walks up and down there for hours. Poor Theodore's mind has entirely returned to him—not quite the same, perhaps, but changed somewhat, as a person's constitution is often said to be changed when they recover from a high fever. He is not even eccentric in any little detail. He has not a single hallucination. Singularly excitable as his nerves are, so that the least sound or movement irritates them, he never imagines anything that does not exist. He could not bear anything now but perfect solitude. He dreads the sight of the outer world."

"I don't see what is the use of talking over these things," remarked Evelyn, coldly. "I have always admired your wisdom, Aunt Gertrude, for burying them in silence."

"There is no use," replied Miss Agate, "only, having had to discuss them with strangers to-day, makes it seem natural, I suppose, to speak of them with friends—unless indeed I weary you?" she added quickly, with ready self-rebuke.

"Weary us! No, indeed you do not," said Philip, warmly. "What a sad fate that poor young wife's was!"

"Ay," sighed Miss Agate, "dear Marian Snowe! If ever, as I have but now told you, there was a good sweet woman, she was one. I never thought my brother Theodore loved her half enough. And yet he could have married her for nothing but pure love. For she had no money, nor any family connections. She was only a governess. She adored Theodore. I used to say she spoiled him. And she was ever kind to me, and did me a great deal of good."

"She must not have had too bright a life from the beginning, being an orphan," remarked Philip.

"I daresay not," said Miss Agate. "But the lady who adopted her was good to her. Marian had never known her parents, but she thought much of them: she used to say she had ever tried to be good, so that when they should meet her in the next world they should have nothing to reproach her with."

"How good that was!" cried Frank involuntarily.

"Grand philosophy!" assented Philip, in his really genial spirit, but half-mocking words.

"Ah, yes, few were like her," sighed Miss Agate. "Theodore, in marrying Marian Snowe, gained a prize. Yet," she added, "there were people found to say that his marriage could not have been happy, for that, from his wedding-day, they had noticed him growing moody and morose."

"And was it so?"

"Well, I too had noticed him sorely changed from what he had been earlier; but in reality the change had begun long before his marriage. It seemed to me to set in while he was away from our house, acting as tutor in a gentleman's mansion in Surrey. After he

came home, I used to wonder if my philosophic, simple-minded brother had been so led away by the luxury in which he had lived there, as to become discontented with our plain ways at home. I felt terribly disappointed in him."

"It may have been so—that he was."

"Ah, no. Theodore's nature was above that. Afterwards, when it fell to my lot to go through his private diaries and papers, I discovered that at that period he had suffered losses and crosses, such as often darken or jar the finest minds. And he had in that mansion met with — But I cannot go on: I have no right to," she broke off with a shiver.

None of her hearers spoke.

"After a short time he married," she resumed, evidently in pain. "And Marian's baby was born, and stolen away; stolen, I am quite certain, by the nurse she had hired. And then Theodore went mad. And Marian died of terror and woe. And since they let Theodore out of the asylum where they put him, he has lived shut in that back room and that strip of green garden."

What a history it was!

"Theodore speaks of Marian sometimes," Miss Agate went on, in a low, awed voice. "He speaks of her as we speak of the dead with whom we have had sweet, happy days. But he has never mentioned the baby, or the manner of Marian's death. Of course, he knows he has been in a lunatic asylum, for he was a sane man before he left it. And I sometimes think that if any horror of the past flits across his mind, he may attribute it to a memory of his own delirious ravings. He never speaks of the time of his madness. And then, you know," she added, "a year after the time my little nephew was lost, my Evelyn was found."

"You need not go into that, Aunt Gertrude," said Evelyn, quite touchily. "I am sure you have explained all about it to Mr. Connell over and over again, asking his advice and that, as to how my relatives might be discovered. And it cannot interest Mr. Frank Raven," she added, with a little toss of her head.

Nothing about Evelyn Agate interested Frank, and so he did not contradict, which probably annoyed her.

"Yours has been a hard life, Miss Agate," said Philip thoughtfully.

"Possibly so," she replied.

"And entirely self-sacrificing."

"Not entirely. No."

"Oh, but it has. It has kept you single. But for all the burden you have had to carry I am sure you would have married."

Miss Agate shook her head with a grave smile. "Many people do not marry," she said. "And certainly, with my poor brother to keep and to care for, my duty was clear."

"Especially clear, as it only cost the entire sacrifice of yourself," repeated Philip drily.

"Aunt Gertrude is exactly the sort of woman who never does get married," observed Evelyn. "I daresay she is happier as she is."

"What sort of women are they who *do* get married?" asked Philip, and Evelyn coloured.

"There's the postman!" she exclaimed, as a double knock was heard: and she sprang from her chair and hurried out.

"Poor Evelyn!" sighed Gertrude Agate, "I'm afraid I cannot have given her a very happy youth, for I think she'd be dreadfully ready to leave me. Had my dear Marian lived, she might have been able to train her into something more nearly resembling herself."

"That poor Marian is on your list of saints," said Philip, kindly.

"And she was a saint. As nearly so as a woman can be."

Evelyn returned. "The letter is for you, Aunt Gertrude," she said in a disappointed tone, as she handed the missive to Miss Agate. "I see it is from the lawyers by the seal, and so I think they might have directed it to me as it must be about my business. Oh, I wonder whether it is good news! I wonder what they have discovered?"

"That you are a Duchess's daughter perhaps," said Philip, gravely, as Miss Agate opened it, and read:

"DEAR MADAM,—We regret that, on our communicating to our client the particulars you kindly gave us this morning, we were informed that they did not in the least suit the case in hand.

"We deeply regret having put you to the trouble of calling on us and the pain of answering our questions,

"And remain, yours truly,

"DEWE AND CREED."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Evelyn. Mortification reddened her cheeks, suppressed rage lay in her voice. The blow of disappointment had shivered the veneer of her nature. She no longer looked handsome. Even her velveteen robe seemed to grow common and tawdry. But ambition had been aroused within her and could not be suppressed again. If these people hold no clue to her birth, others might hold one. And, indeed, who was to know whether these lawyers told truth or not. Perhaps they did not choose to speak yet, that the time for it was not come. She said something of this aloud.

"Perhaps so," assented Miss Agate calmly. "Meanwhile, Evelyn, my dear, you must be content to wait."

"Yes, Aunt Gertrude, but not here. I shall put an advertisement in the *Times* now for a situation as Lady's Companion. I will write it out this very night."

CHAPTER X.

MRS. RAVEN ADVERTISES.

MRS. RAVEN returned to Ravenstoke by an afternoon train on the Saturday, which enabled her to reach the Court in time for a late dinner. She had taken her comings and goings on this occasion quite into her own hands, having given directions that no carriage should be sent to await her at the station, and that, if she were not home in time, dinner need not be kept for her. She re-appeared, however, sooner than was expected, and it was thought she could not have had much time in London. Charity Hale, who met her in the hall, took the liberty of expressing her surprise as she followed her to her dressing-room.

"You are soon at home again, madam," she said, looking at Mrs. Raven, with her keen, peering eyes. "It was nice that you should get through your business so quickly."

"I did not get through it at all," said Mrs. Raven. "I didn't succeed to-day, Charity."

"Oh, what a pity, ma'am," cried Charity. "Shall you have to take that weary journey again? Could not somebody else do it for you? What is hard and tiring for a lady like you, might be quite easy to some people—say, to the likes of me. If, indeed, it is business that you could entrust to others."

"Has anything happened—or anybody called—during my absence?" asked Mrs. Raven, passing over Charity's words, and keeping her back towards her while she hastily made the few slight toilet arrangements necessary for a tête-à-tête dinner with her son.

"The Vicar has been, ma'am. He took lunch with master. James Sloam waited on them, and he says the parson talked a deal about Master Frank, and seemed rare fond of him.—I knew that would please you, ma'am," added Charity, as though Mrs. Raven had smiled—which she had not.

"James Sloam must learn that it is no part of a page's duty to chatter over what he hears at table," coldly replied Mrs. Raven. "I hope you reminded him of that."

"James Sloam will learn his duty in time, ma'am: he wouldn't talk over things to anybody but me," said the old woman. "I'll warrant he'd not say a word even to his own father, knowing that there are times when Eldred's wits go out."

"No other visitor?" said Mrs. Raven, chafing under the woman's words—as she often had to chafe. But she rarely checked Charity Hale.

"No, ma'am," answered Charity. "The Squire—he's been going about, putting things to rights or wrongs, according as people may think. Everything is going to be cleared up and cleaned out."

"Has he been down at the Vale Cottages, about those pigsties?" asked Mrs. Raven.

"I think so," said Charity. "I'm mortal feared we'll have a fever break out if they are touched. To my idea stirring dangerous stuff to get it away is more likely to breed pestilence than leaving it at peace to waste away in the course of nature. But then I know that the letting it alone is only the way of poor, ignorant folk, and gentry can't be expected to abide it. The gentry canna let things be. It is only low people who would leave a cur sleeping, sooner than get a bite from him."

Mrs. Raven said nothing in reply. It had not occurred to her, while she turned her back on the old woman, that Charity could watch her face reflected in the mirror. But as she suddenly moved away, the old woman's image displaced her own in the looking-glass, and she caught a strange smile lurking about the thin lips. Quitting the room without a word, she left Charity standing in it.

Mrs. Raven went straight to the dining-room, though the gong had not yet sounded. The table was already spread, and the lamps were burning dimly, for the setting sun had still left a strong glory in the heavens above the belt of firs which bounded the horizon in that direction. Mrs. Raven lingered at the window, looking out, but seeing nothing. She had stood so for ten minutes before the gong sounded and her son came in.

He greeted her with a surprised, cold exclamation: "Are you back so soon?" and went straight to his seat. She lingered a moment beside him as she passed to her place. But he was unfolding his napkin and did not even look towards her. Kissing and clasping hands were not among the habits of the house. Mrs. Raven herself had checked Frank in those manifestations, and Leonard had never attempted them.

The meal was very silent. The page, James Sloam, was not in attendance, only the old butler, Budd, and a footman who went in and out of the room carrying dishes.

"I did not expect you could get back so soon," remarked her son. "Did you carry out your appointment?"

"Oh yes," she said in a slow indifferent tone, pausing to indicate her wish for some condiment on the table. "Oh yes, and it was very wearisome to find how easy it seemed to get at everything but what one wanted. I don't think I shall look out for it any more."

"I'm afraid you had not sufficiently defined ideas of what you did want," observed Leonard.

She looked across the table with a sudden flash in her grey eyes. But she said nothing. She was only too thankful if he would let the subject drop thus, until they were alone.

When the meal was over, they both rose: Leonard rarely stayed to drink wine, and he instantly went to the little writing-table in the corner, and began to sum up figures in some account-book. He had got

into the habit of using this writing-table during his father's life time, when the Squire required the apartment which was called the study; though the only books in it were a few agricultural works and some legal treatises on the position of landlord and tenant.

The butler proceeded to clear the table, wondering why his mistress did not retire as usual to the drawing-room. She could not find heart to go there; she knew Leonard would not follow her till a late hour, and to-night she felt so lonely—and it was so large and drear. She asked the old servant to bring her work-basket to her here. Budd obeyed, still wondering.

Leonard went on with his accounts, and Mrs. Raven stitched in silence. She had made up her mind that he should speak first, and his delay fretted her. It argued indifference and even contempt for a matter which she had led him to believe was eating away her heart. She knew that she meant to take a new cue now—and a false one—and she feverishly hoped he would readily accept her shifted position. And yet it nettled her to know that he had not heartily entered into her first standpoint.

Suddenly he wheeled his chair about, and spoke. "I've done now. There's really nothing like getting everything stated in detail. I have struck forty pounds off the building estimates for the row of new cottages in Pond Lane, simply by finding that the porches cost that sum, and need not be added. And now, mother, tell me all about your interview in London. Whom did you see—and what did you find out?"

"I saw both the partners in the firm," she said, spreading her work on her knee and nervously folding and unfolding it. "And really it was very interesting—and painful. But there was nothing to act upon, and I may as well say at once, Leonard, that all I heard to-day does not induce me to prosecute the inquiry. There are more mysteries in the world than we are apt to imagine," she added, having kept her eyes down while she spoke.

"I am inclined to think there is no mystery here except in your imagination," returned Leonard, firmly. "You remember I have said so from the beginning. But if it really has had a strong hold on you all these years, I cannot understand your keeping it to yourself until now."

"I kept silence," she said slowly, "for many reasons. First, because I doubted my own powers of judgment, even as you doubt them now. I was in the first weakness of my confinement when the suspicion came——"

"Still, it was but a suspicion, and no proof: you admit that," interrupted Leonard.

"Of course," said Mrs. Raven—and there she stopped to cough. "It shows my powers of self-command, that I gave it no word then. I argued with myself that if it were unreasonable, any whisper of doubt would create unnecessary scandal, but that if it were reasonable

some better time would serve as well. And then your father was so proud of the fine healthy baby—and you, Leonard, were still so delicate—and he used to impress me with the vastness of the blessing which had at last given a hopeful heir to his old family line.”

There was a pause. Both were thinking.

“But Frank certainly has a Raven look, though he has not the Raven hair,” observed Leonard, glancing at Gilbert Raven’s portrait on the wall. Leonard had not loved his father, nor had he, either by nature or training, any fine instincts or principles of morality. If Frank was not Mrs. Raven’s son, there seemed one easy way of accounting for his introduction into the family circle.

“I thought of that, too,” said the widow, lowering her voice as she caught Leonard’s unspoken thought. “I reflected that to breathe any doubt was to cast a slur on my husband’s honour; and I felt sure that any such slur could not attach to him, that he was not one to deserve it. No, that could never have been true, Leonard: so I made up my mind to bear in silence. You, my own boy, lived and flourished; why should I disturb the peace of the family by what seemed so like a whim?”

“Why, indeed,” remarked Leonard.

“But, then,” resumed Mrs. Raven, “look at your father’s strange will! What did it mean? I marvelled; had he, too, had his doubts, and kept them secret? And anything that gave colour to my old suspicion could only arouse a craving that had always accompanied it, to put, if possible, the uncertainty at rest; and so I spoke to you, Leonard. If Frank be not my child—where is my child?”

“Dead, probably, if it was indeed taken from you,” said Leonard coolly. “I’m sure it is a miracle I lived, with the utmost skill and attention lavished on me. I believe that you have built up the whole story from a craze that got into your head when you were half delirious, mother—and your long-kept-up reticence served but to nourish it. How could such a thing be done—your own child changed for another—unless those about you were treacherous?”

“True,” she faintly responded.

“As for my father’s will, I don’t think there was anything so very peculiar about it, and what there was, points in a different direction from your fancy. Frank was undoubtedly my father’s favourite, and his arrangement, I think, shows how much he trusted your love for Frank. Would he have done so, had he any reason for guessing that you might, sooner or later, discover his favourite to be but a changeling? For I know Frank *was* my father’s favourite: he never cared for me,” Leonard repeated frankly.

“All you say is very reasonable, Leonard,” said his mother, softly. “So reasonable, that it confirms me in the wisdom of my decision to stop in this quest. Since you think as you do, you will be glad to hear that I told the lawyers to make no further inquiries.”

“That’s all right,” said Leonard; “had you found it practicable

to air your fancy years ago, you would have abandoned it long ago; that's my opinion. I suppose ventilation is as necessary for people's minds as for their houses. And considering how hard it is to reconcile them to it in the latter, I expect they keep their former in a terribly stuffy state."

"I suppose I had better make a full confession while I am about it," she went on in a strange low tone; which, to any ear less obtuse than her son's, would have conveyed the idea of caressing, almost cringing, entreaty. "All these years, especially when I felt disappointed by Frank's strong, restless, active boyishness, I have allowed my imagination to dwell on that (possibly) lost child of my own. I always picture it a girl. You see, in my own mind, I could picture it anything I liked, and it was easier to dream of a daughter as my sympathising companion in all my lonely walks and works."

"It is a great pity you never had a daughter of your own, mother," said Leonard.

"I have had a very solitary life," cried Mrs. Raven, with a sudden passion which startled even Leonard, while she went on with what seemed strangely like self-vindication against some invisible accuser. "I believe I should have been quite a different creature had I lived the crowded, sunshiny life of most women. They are not good or happy thoughts which come by brooding! And now," she added after a moment's pause, and with a sudden return to her ordinary manner, "my life is lonelier than ever. Though your father spent so much time in the open air, and though Frank had so little in common with me, yet their absence leaves a great blank. I have made up my mind that Frank must be got home as quickly as possible, and brought to a better understanding with us. But it is not likely he will ever settle down here; he will only come and go. And in these silent days I am getting haunted by the idea of this daughter I have so long fancied I might have had."

Leonard could not quite understand his mother.

"Do not check me for speaking out this fresh folly, Leonard, when you have just blamed me for concealing another. I must have some sort of companionship; some young girl here who will love me."

"What do you want to do?" Leonard inquired, rather unsympathetically.

"I am thinking of advertising for a lady companion," she said, rising from her chair, and bending over a vase of flowers on a stand, "but I would not do such a thing without consulting you."

"Why not?" asked Leonard. "What right have I to interfere in your wishes?"

"You will have to tolerate her in the family," said his mother. "She must sit at table with us. It will be a great boon to me if you can endure it, and if I find a person who suits me, we shall be well accustomed to each other by the time I have to leave here and go to

the dower-house—when you marry.” She had come round to his side, and laid both her hands on his shoulder.

“There will be no hurry for that,” he observed.

“And promise me one thing, Leonard,” she went on, “and do not be angry with me for exacting the promise.”

“What is it?” he asked.

“That you will not be led away into falling in love with any young person I may hire.”

Leonard laughed. “That is easily promised, mother. If I ever marry, I have made up my mind to marry enough money to buy the Overhill estate: the land would lie so well with mine. You needn’t be afraid for me. But if you’ve made up your mind to have Frank at home again, that will be a different matter. He is sure to do the wrong thing and leave undone the right.”

“Frank is not you,” remarked his mother, coldly. “He will never be anything but a second son.”

“I don’t know that you are wise in wanting to bring him much about this house now,” reflected Leonard. “Whenever I do marry, he must go, of course; and the less he has grown to regard Raven as his head-quarters when that time comes, the better for us both.”

“You have always so much common sense, Leonard,” said Mrs. Raven, wearily. “But you must yield to me in this, my dear. I must have Frank here once more—not as a guest, knowing when he is to go, but as an inmate. I have been vainly telling myself that I *must* be his mother for the last twenty-two years, and just as I began to leave off so doing, the mother yearning has come,” she added, with a piteous smile. “He will not interfere with you. And I must have my companion, too. I have your permission and your promise as to *her*, have I not, Leonard?”

“Certainly,” he answered. “Both were alike unnecessary.”

“Then, as this has been a fatiguing day and I feel tired, I will go to my room,” she said, rising. “Good night, Leonard.”

“Good night, mother,” he responded, and opened the door for her to pass out.

“I never thought her nerves could have shaken so,” reflected Leonard as he returned to his seat. “Why, she looks as if she had just recovered from a fever. I ought to have put my veto on all this imaginary nonsense when she first mentioned it. But she pleaded as plausibly on the one side then, as she pleads to-night on the other. And then, too, I am quite sure she had her suspicions of—of my father. It is indeed high time she had a companion; and when she gets one, I must send them both away for change of air and scene.”

Mrs. Raven went to her room, it is true, but she did not go to her bed. She opened her desk, and sat down before it.

She wanted a companion: how was she to discover one? True, the want had been suggested to her by hearing that Evelyn Agate wished to go out as such. She wanted *her*.

We can act upon what we hear: but what we overhear may paralyse us. We can scarcely act upon a knowledge we ought not to have possessed. How were the demand and the supply to be brought together?

She had Miss Agate's address. She had seen it on the note the lawyer had shown her, and there was no fear of her forgetting it. But it was impossible to write to a stranger, inquiring if any member of her family wished to become a lady's companion. Such a course would be certainly both impertinent and suspicious, sure to defeat its own ends. It was equally impossible to communicate with Miss Agate through the solicitors.

No: there was no direct path to attain her wish. There was nothing to be done, save write a tempting advertisement and send it to the newspapers. If Evelyn Agate really wished for such a situation, she would be sure to search them. And Mrs. Raven proceeded to draw one up.

She tried to make it as pleasant as possible. She lingered over its composition almost lovingly, touching and re-touching again and again. The result stood thus.

"Wanted, by a lady of position, having no daughters, a young lady to act as companion. A beautiful country home and a liberal salary are offered, and she will be treated with motherly kindness and consideration." And applications were requested to be addressed to the chief library in the neighbouring county town, Standchester.

Mrs. Raven wrote six copies of this before she went to bed—each to be forwarded to an eligible London newspaper.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LODGER AT THE PITCHFORK.

MRS. RAVEN made no concealment of her advertisement. She rang for her maid, and gave the letters into her keeping, to be carried to the letter-rack, against the postman brought his bag on the Monday morning.

Thus the whole household had the opportunity of seeing the waiting letters, and they made their comments.

"Six newspapers!" exclaimed Mrs. Sims, the housekeeper, as she sat at the breakfast-table of the upper servants on this same Monday morning. "What can the mistress have to say to six newspapers?"

"Charity Hale knows," said one of the others, noticing the sly pursing of the old woman's thin lips. "Charity Hale knows everything—only she never tells."

"A still tongue makes a wise head," croaked Charity.

"Mrs. Raven may be advertising for a furnished house at a water-

ing place," suggested the butler. "She needs a change; she has seemed poorly ever since the Squire died."

"What did she go to London for on Saturday?" cried Sims. "To see a house agent, perhaps? She seemed to have been looking for something, I thought, when she came home, and to have got downcast because she did not get it."

"It's more likely she's going to make changes here," hazarded Fanny, the only young domestic present; "get brisker servants, or something. How would you like *that*, Mrs. Sims?"

"I don't think that," put in Budd: "hold your silly tongue, girl."

"Well," said the girl, pertly, "it is hardly likely the changes that are said to be afloat out of doors, will stop there."

"They are to go on briskly enough there, I fancy," admitted the butler. "It's said that one of the first to be sent off the estate will be Eldred Sloam."

"What, out of his cottage!" cried the housekeeper.

Mr. Budd nodded. "I heard the master say as much to Mr. Toynbee on Saturday when I was waiting on them at lunch."

Charity set down her cup of tea and gave a little cough, as if she had narrowly escaped choking. "It was not you who waited at lunch on Saturday," she said to the butler, snappishly; "it was James Sloam."

"It was I at first—until James came in. As to Sloam, he'd not be a loss to anybody if he did go: unless it was to James. And not to him, either, that I see. That the lad has grown up a good and decent lad, though a bit soft, is no thanks to his father. A nice example *he* has set him!"

"You are right there, Mr. Budd," assented Mrs. Sims. "James takes after his mother, poor body. She was a plain girl, but as true-hearted as you'd wish. She was in the still-room here when I came first; one of those quiet girls that don't get noticed much. Eldred Sloam used to be coming here, after her, I thought; and there was something about the man that I did not like, handsome though he was. 'Don't you have aught to say to him, Jane,' I said to her; ay, more than once. But in spite of all I could do or say, the silly girl married him."

"Oh," flippantly remarked Fanny. "Pity is akin to love, they say."

"Pity is the back-door of love, I say," retorted Mrs. Sims, "and it's not the best of characters that enter that way. And so poor Jane found to her cost. She had to put up with Eldred Sloam for eleven years, with his ill-doings and his temper, and all that while she never said a true word against him in anger, nor a false one of praise out of pride. I was with her when she died, poor body, and I've always taken an interest in her boy James for her sake. It's not much his father has taken, more shame for him."

"He is a rare good-looking man yet, I think, is Eldred Sloam,"

put in Fanny aggressively, simply because she liked to retort on the elder servants.

"As Squire Eldred Raven was before him," cried Charity Hale.

"Maybe—with a difference, though," said Mrs. Sims. "Squire Eldred looked like a gentleman, for all his wild ways, as I've heard say many times; this man looks like a dauntless ne'er-do-well."

"Eldred Sloam would have been a different man if he had had the luck to get the right sort of wife," said Charity, with asperity. "Instead of a soft thing like Jane."

"And that a man like him takes care not to get," said Mrs. Sims. "The right sort for him wouldn't have been a Christian English woman, but a wild Tartar. If ever a man deserved to be served out himself for what he has brought on others, it's Eldred Sloam. Look at the story told about that poor young girl—what was her name?—Hester Walker—some years before!"

"What was that?" asked Fanny, eagerly.

"There are stories and things one don't care to talk of in public," put in the butler hastily, who may have thought it time to interfere. It was somewhat difficult, however, to arrest Mrs. Sims' tongue, once it was fairly set going.

"You needn't be afraid, Mr. Budd. I know, I hope, what things may be said and what may not. A young lass came into the place from some one of the villages near to take service with the Miss Maynes—two ladies who lived at Cross Cottage. Her name was Hester Walker: as nice a little girl as you'd see, Mrs. Fisher says. And Eldred, he was soon after her, and everybody thought he was going to get married that time—they had thought it before, you see. By-and-by the lass took to go about crying; her mistresses could not make it out. One day she came to them and said she must go home, that her mother had sent for her, and she packed her trunk and went—and it put out the old ladies dreadfully. They were frightened and angry and they let her go."

"And what became of her?" asked Fanny, eagerly.

"Ah—what? Who knows? A week or two afterwards the mother came over to Cross Cottage to see her daughter, not hearing from her latterly, she told the ladies. She had not seen Hester, and did not know she had left her situation. A fine to-do it made. Everybody laid the blame at Eldred Sloam's door, saying he had kidnapped her, though Mrs. Fisher always did believe him, and always will, when he declared he did not know what had become of that girl. He says so to this day. Jane knew that story, mind you; for I took care to repeat it all to her, word for word, just as Mrs. Fisher related it to me. But it did no good: Jane wouldn't believe a word of it."

"She didn't think anybody had invented it, did she?" asked Charity, with a sneer. "Who's this, bursting in?"

The door was flung back with a bound, and the page, James Sloam, entered. His broad, plebeian face certainly owed nothing to any

presumed aristocratic blood on his father's side. But its coarse plainness was redeemed by the frankness and kindness of its expression. Sent by the coachman on an early errand to the village, he had there met, as was evident, with something to excite him.

"Does anybody here believe in witches?" he asked, as he stood with open mouth and eyes, before the company.

"What do you mean by talking of witches?" croaked Charity severely.

"There's a witch at the Pitchfork," answered the lad. "I went over there about the straw, and Giles the ostler told me of her."

"Don't you go and be friendly with the Pitchfork—or with its ostler either," advised Mrs. Sims. "If the late Squire had been of my opinion, he'd not have allowed any tavern in the place, save the old respectable White Hart. That Pitchfork *is* a beauty. What did Giles say about a witch?"

"She doesn't call herself a witch, ma'am, Giles said; she calls herself a—some queer word—a—clear-voyer," stammered Jem.

"A clairvoyante," exclaimed the butler. "Oh, then, that's a different thing. Clairvoyance is scientific. Leastways, it's said to be a new power, sprung up of late years."

"Giles says she does not want to do any clear-voying here," resumed James. "She only told them she was one that they might not be frightened if she took a queer sort of fit. She's a foreigner, from Egypt, they think: a big, dark woman, fair spoken. Well, the missis at the Pitchfork, hearing this, was taken with a wish to know something about her brother that went to sea and never came back. And Worsfold, he said to his wife, 'Of course she could tell you something about your brother—I could do that myself,' said he, 'but how are you going to decide whether it's true or not.'"

"There's more sense in Worsfold than one would have thought," remarked Mrs. Sims.

"The missis saw the force of that," said James, "and she thought it over. 'Suppose,' says she to Worsfold, 'we was to ask her to tell us all she can about us, saying ne'er a word ourselves; then, if she speaks truth about what we do know, surely we may trust her to speak it about what we don't.' And so up she went to the lodger, and they had a deal of talking together; and the master, Giles says, was waiting anxious at the bottom of the stairs. But she brought no news down. The clear-voyer wouldn't do anything then—or couldn't, maybe, thinks Giles. She told the missis she did not want to do anything in this place, Ravenstoke, because there was evil in the air."

"Like her impudence!" exclaimed Mrs. Sims.

"That set the missis on, more eager than ever, Giles says: he's not sure that it didn't set the master. She went up again to the clear-voyer and told her she'd make it well worth her while; but the clear-voyer answered at once that if she spoke of money it would spoil

her gift altogether : that what she did, she did for love—to help people, never for money.”

“Come, that looks honest. What next, James?”

“And at last she promised that she'd do her best by-and-by. And a precious puzzling best it is, Giles says. Yesterday afternoon, when all was quiet about the place, being Sunday, the clear-voyer had 'em up to her room, Worsfold and his wife both, with the blinds pulled close down, and she said the fit was coming on and presently she'd go off quite insensible, and in that state tell them what they wanted to know. Sure enough she did go off, and began to talk in her sleep as it were, and they both listened, all in a fright like, to what she said. She lay back with her eyes shut, giving one or two little snores or gasps ; and the missis she crept to the door and let in Dolly the maid, and Giles himself stood all eager to hear outside.”

“Best to have witnesses in such unearthly doings,” nodded Sims.

“They all sat as still as mice,” continued James, “till she began to mutter. And then, Giles thinks they got more than they bargained for. For not only did the clear-voyer tell of the missis's brother that went to sea, but she told why he went—to get out of the way after stealing the old schoolmaster's hens. Which was true enough.”

“My patience !” ejaculated Fanny. James went on.

“The queer thing was, she didn't tell things right plain out, but said she saw him among birds in a yard—and then running round a corner and looking, scared, behind him ; and then on a big ship ; and last of all, lying stretched out, under a great tree, of some strange sort such as she'd never seen before. But more than that. She told how Worsfold's father had been drowned in a mill-dam—a noisy water with a big wheel going round, she called it. She even let on how he'd been drinking too much before it happened. Giles said his blood ran cold, for he thought she might be reading out next how he went to the cellar last Christmas and helped himself to the brandy : and Dolly, he says, looked on her part awful queer.”

James's present listeners did not know what to make of this, or how to take it. “Is that all ?” they asked.

“No, it is not all,” answered the boy, impressively. “For she went on, talking about the evil in the air, that which is past and that which is coming : and next she seemed to see a tall figure that walks at night between the Court and the cottage—and Giles says there couldn't well be any mistake that she meant father's cottage. It had walked at times for years and years, she said, and it wasn't laid yet, and no living mortal could foresee when it would be.”

Mrs. Sims, taking the bacon-dish from the table at the moment, let it drop in consternation.

“Did she speak of *that*, James? Mercy preserve us! Did she say—did she say what the figure was like?”

“Not much of that, I think,” answered the lad. “Only that he

had a red mark on his neck ; and she could see him turn round about, she said, and shake his fist at the Court."

"That woman's nothing canny, you may be sure," spoke Charity Hale. "Witch, or no witch, she must have dealings"—and the old nurse paused with a meaning shiver—"dealings underground. As to the figure—it has not been seen lately."

"I don't know that," corrected the butler. "Mrs. Fisher, at the White Hart, tells a tale of some young lady, staying there recently for the night, being frightened by a queer-looking character that she met by starlight on that same road. Or moonlight—I forget which she said. The young lady spoke about it to Mrs. Fisher, and the landlady, in her turn, spoke to me."

James went on. "When the clear-voyer came to her senses, Worsfold hinted that they'd be ready to pay her well for what she had done, and that he did not intend to take any score from her. But she bade him hold his tongue : that she should pay him as she paid other inn-keepers ; and she reminded him that she took no pay for what she was enabled to tell. She speaks real haughty, Giles says, and has such a grand manner with her."

"I wonder," slowly deliberated Mr. Budd, "why she should have come to the Pitchfork at all ?"

"The curious thing is, sir, Giles says, that his missis is not a bit easier in her mind about her brother than she was before. First thing this morning she and Worsfold fell out over it, she saying the clear-voyer's words meant that Tom is resting himself on some desert island, maybe after his labours in digging up gold, and that he'll hail a ship some day and come home and make their fortunes. But he says it's meant that Tom is stretched out stark and cold at the bottom of the sea, among the corals and things that grow there ; and that he should always have thought so without being told, but for knowing that his brother-in-law, Tom, was one of those unlucky people that escape drowning for hanging."

"And as that is all you have to tell, I suppose, James," cried Mrs. Sims, "you can go into the pantry and set about your duties."

It appeared the signal for the rest to rise, and to go about theirs. Presently no one was left in the room, save Mrs. Sims and the lady's-maid, Janet Mackay : a staid, respectable Scotchwoman, who had not very long come into service at the Court. Naturally reticent and cautious, she had listened to the conversation in silence.

"There has been a good deal said that you don't understand, I suppose ?" began the housekeeper to her presently.

"In truth I don't," answered Janet. "That allusion to a figure that walks between the Court and Eldred Sloam's—is it a ghost ?"

"Supposed to be. The ghost of Squire Eldred Raven. And good cause his spirit has to walk that road : he walked it too often in his lifetime."

"How so ?"

"That cottage of Sloam's was the laundry in those days ; and where there is a laundry there is generally a laundry-maid, you know, and she is sometimes pretty. Perhaps I had better tell you the story from the beginning."

"If you would. I have felt puzzled sometimes at these allusions."

"Squire Eldred Raven, a fine, handsome man as was ever seen, I hear, but wild and careless as to conduct, lived here, a bachelor. His brother, Captain Raven, was with his regiment in India ; news came that he was killed in battle, and the Squire here wrote to tell the widow she had better come home—her little son would be his heir, you see, unless he married, himself. The poor lady, weakened by sorrow, was not strong enough to undertake the voyage, but she sent the little boy, Henry. Charity Hale, a young woman then, became his nurse, and the Squire grew very fond of the child ——"

"I beg your pardon for interrupting the story," spoke Janet. "That child, Henry—was it our late master who has just died?"

"To be sure it was. After a bit, the lady started from India with her other child, a baby-girl, but she died on the voyage, poor thing, and only the little girl arrived—Miss Millicent, she that's Mrs. Connell now. Well, after a time, a younger sister of Charity Hale's came into service here, to do light things—not rough work. Never such a contrast hardly seen, I've heard, as there was between her and Charity. Charity, plain in face, crabbed, prim, and with all the ways of a servant ; Salome, pretty and bright and ladylike, though always idle and flighty. Some whim took Charity after a bit to put her sister into the laundry, to learn to iron, and Salome went there to the old widow Sloam, who was head of it. By-and-by, people began to talk. They asked what it was that Squire Eldred wanted at the laundry-house in an evening—for he would be seen going there. Well, it was the old tale, Janet ; and the next thing that appeared at the laundry was a baby—this very Eldred Sloam."

"Eldred Sloam ? I do not understand."

"The poor child had no right to any name in particular, you see, so they called him that for want of a better, and it was like his mother's Christian name. It was said that Charity took him to church and had him named Eldred—which was like her impudence. She did it out of spite, perhaps ; for she really loved Salome, and the discovery drove her nearly mad. Salome never held up her head again ; the disgrace had tried her. Before she was anything like well, she left the cottage, running away from it one morning betimes, escaping from Squire Eldred and his wiles. The Squire went in search of her, and found her ; in London, as was said, but nobody knew where for certain. In a month or two's time she was back again at the old cottage with Mrs. Sloam. The laundry had then been removed to the back premises here, where it is still, and Mrs. Sloam had the cottage without the work, and attended to the baby,

Eldred. Well, Janet, in time there came another baby, and poor Salome died when it was born."

"Died!"

"And in two or three days afterwards, Squire Eldred was dead."

Janet Mackay nearly screamed.

"It was said he was the worse for liquor; I don't know if that's true; but he was on horseback, and the horse grew restive and ran away and threw him. He was killed on the spot. And it happened on the very walk that he took so often in his life-time, for the horse was dashing madly across it, and he fell right in the path."

"What a dreadful thing!"

"The little nephew, Henry, succeeded to all the property. His trustees allowed Mrs. Sloam, who had charge of the boy, Eldred, to retain the house, and paid her some money weekly. Whether they did it out of a feeling of justice, or whether Squire Eldred had ever said to his lawyer that he wished it done in case of ill happening to him, was not known. When Squire Henry came of age, he continued to do the same thing—to the widow Sloam until her death, and then to the man Eldred—not liking, I take it, to root up old institutions. It is whispered now, though, that the new Squire intends to stop the weekly allowance and to turn the man from the cottage. Eldred Sloam is no credit to the place, but I shouldn't."

"What was it they meant about a red mark on the neck?"

"Squire Eldred had a large curious red mark on his neck, was born with it. Not but what the Squire was red all over; and he had the Raven red hair, and so had Squire Henry: and so has Eldred Sloam."

"And the present master also," said Janet.

"The present master! The young master's is reddish in a way, but his is no more like the real Raven hair than withered grass is like full-eared corn."

"What became of Salome Hale's last baby?"

"It was fetched away by some of poor Salome's people and has never been heard of since. I daresay it's dead; 'twas a little girl. Charity couldn't take it, you see, being here at the Court, even if she would. That past business just soured her for life, and has made her the cynical woman she is. The Hales were superior people, you see, till this happened, above the run of common servants, and the disgrace told upon them. There was another sister, I believe, but she didn't live in these parts."

"It is a sad history," was the comment of Janet Mackay.

"Charity liked the Squire who has just gone; it seems to me that she quite resents his death, if you can understand such a thing," concluded Sims. "But she does not like Mr. Leonard: and there has never been any love lost between her and Mrs. Raven."

"And what became of the sister—the little lady from India?"

"Miss Millicent Raven—oh, she grew up here with her brother. After Squire Eldred's death the trustees got a lady to come here to

superintend the children ; she was some relation, I've heard, of their mother. A nice lady she was, good and capable, but she died close upon Miss Millicent's marriage. Miss Millicent's name is not often mentioned in the house. She married to please herself ; he was only a dissenting minister, a worthy gentleman, I believe, but not high enough for the Ravens. The Squire thought she might have done better, and was very angry : he and his sister never met after her marriage. It was her son who came down here for a few days last autumn for the shooting."

"What ! That light-hearted young barrister ?"

"Yes. Mr. Philip Connell."

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. RAVEN DOES HER DUTY.

WHEN Charity left the servants' hall, she went straight towards Mrs. Raven's apartments. That lady was seated behind her davenport in the boudoir, making out a list of some valuable family lace, before laying it away until her days of mourning should be ended. She looked up when the door opened—and her eyes and Charity's met. The lady's fell.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Charity, in her smooth, acid tones. "Do you want me this morning ?"

Mrs. Raven went on with her writing, but her hand trembled, and she found a strange difficulty in spelling such a simple word as *fichu*.

"Presently, Charity," she said. "I wish to arrange some of my drawers this morning : your good memory and tidy touch are just what I require. I want a great deal of such help now-a-days. Do you know, Charity, I am thinking of taking a young lady-companion."

"Indeed, madam," said Charity, "that's a very nice idea—and a natural one. Once on a time, ladies could get those that were almost gentlefolks themselves, to be their maids. It is not so now. They mustn't be called by that name. But many a young lady would be glad to come and live with you, and do some of the little things that maids were fit for once."

"I have Mackay—and I have you, Charity," said Mrs. Raven, "but I feel very lonely, and my sons must be away from me, and so I have advertised for a lady companion. The letters that went off this morning contained the advertisement."

"Now, was I not clever ?" cried Charity in a sort of eldritch glee. "I could not help fancying it was something of that sort the minute I saw those letters."

Mrs. Raven's heart beat heavily. She was now standing before a small set of toilet drawers, which held private matters, and went on examining them. Unfolding a roll of richly brocaded, cherry-coloured ribbon, she observed that it might be dyed : the colour was a little

faded, and therefore it would be useless to put it away, and it would take black beautifully.

"I don't know," said Charity, "the fading would not show if it were twisted up into the bows and fal-lals young damsels wear on their gowns now-a-days. The new young lady that's coming might be rare glad of it, madam."

"A companion is not a maid to receive worn garments, Charity," answered Mrs. Raven, bending over her ribbons and speaking very quietly, but with a red spot burning strangely in her cheeks.

"No, no, madam; don't think I misunderstand," returned the old woman. "But a lady like you might give her some of your own things, as you might to a daughter of your own."

"I've often wished I had a daughter, Charity," said Mrs. Raven. "Though if we are wise, we should wish for nothing that does not exist."

"Ah, true, madam. But who is always wise? And sometimes, when we get what we wish, we wish back what we had before. But changes must come, anyway. It is in the course of nature."

"The less change the better!" retorted Mrs. Raven, with a sudden energy. Her soul was crying out for some lonely hermitage in some vast wilderness, where nothing could mark the passing of the days but the rising and setting of the sun; so that she might have possible rest from the doubts and suspicions and fears which haunted her like a host of invisible and tormenting demons.

"I think so too, madam: the less change the better. But the new Squire doesn't."

"Some changes must be for the better, of course, Charity."

"Aye," returned the woman, "and of course all is for the best, and will turn out right. But there's risks in most things."

Mrs. Raven did not look up. She knew those small sharp eyes were on her, and she felt cold from head to foot.

"I'm fearing to myself that the Squire may be thinking me an encumbrance next," said Charity. "I hope he will speak if he does. I should not like to stay to be a burden. I have long thought of a day when I might be told to go—and I've provided for it," she added, in a low whisper; which had nothing of bravado or insolence in it, but which, somehow, Mrs. Raven shuddered at.

"My son will not interfere with the household servants while I am here. Note you that, Charity."

"Ah, no, perhaps not, ma'am. But poor people have their feelings like rich ones, and if one's place is turned inside out, one might as well be turned outside oneself. I am not quite myself, maybe, this morning," she added, "for I have been hearing something I don't like: and we get frightened easily when we are old."

"What is it that you have been hearing?"

"There is a strangely queer woman staying at the Pitchfork. James went there on an errand, and he brought back the news. She pro-

fesses to see the past, and to foretell the future—and she declares that there is evil in the air at Ravenstoke.”

Mrs. Raven had looked round in surprise. “Why, who is she?—What can she be doing at the Pitchfork?”

“That’s what I should like to know,” said Charity. “She talks of ghosts, too. She told the people there that the figure of a tall man, with a red mark on his neck, walks at night along the Warren Road, and looks back to shake his fist at the Court here. I am glad Mr. Frank is away, madam: though I dare be bound he’d only laugh at it, and call it rubbish. I knew a lady who could never bear to hear the wind in the ivy when her husband was away from home. The meaning of things is in the ear that hears them.”

Mrs. Raven sat down in the chair that was drawn up close behind her, a whole world of thought revolving in her brain. A curious dread of this strange woman had seized upon her mind. What did she know?—for what purpose had she come to Ravenstoke? Charity saw her mistress’s perplexity.

“Don’t you take it to heart, madam,” she cried. “I’d not have told you, but that I thought you’d be above caring for it. But it’s little wonder you are nervous just now, with the trouble there’s been in the house.”

“I’m not taking it to heart, Charity: what do you mean? But I am vexed. These people ought not to be allowed to say such things. They are wicked and cruel.”

“No, they ought not,” assented Charity, quite readily. “For a ghost is seldom a credit to a gentleman’s house, though it may be interesting to strangers round about it. Dear, dear, how the dust is getting into these little drawers!” broke off Charity, in a different tone, peeping into the contents of a Duchesse toilet-table.

“We must spread paper on the top of them: they won’t be opened again for a long while,” said Mrs. Raven, wearily.

“They will have to be very small sheets of paper,” remarked Charity; “and they always get caught in the backs of the drawers.”

“Go downstairs and get some of my thick note-paper with the coloured monogram on it,” directed her mistress, after a moment’s thought. “It is so thick that it will stay as we put it. You will find it in the bottom drawer of the cabinet in the back drawing-room.”

Charity obeyed. She was not gone three minutes; for though she was a little lame, and at times walked heavily, she was often wonderfully active for a woman of her years. She handed the packet to Mrs. Raven.

“Is that right, madam? I found it where you told me.”

And then they busied themselves with the shaking out, assorting, and refolding of the delicate laces, Charity passing them on to her mistress, who packed them away and covered them up with her own hands.

“I hope none of our servants have been to see this fortune-teller,”

exclaimed Mrs. Raven, as if the thought had struck her. "Or that they will go. It is wrong to countenance such people. They are often thieves, or worse."

"I'd not answer for what the servants may do, madam. They are but simple ones."

"The Squire will be annoyed if he hears of this. Especially if those foolish stories, about the figure appearing again in the Warren Walk, gain currency."

"And that they will be sure to do," asserted Charity in a positive tone. "The girls will be going out to look for it now, I shouldn't wonder."

"This gipsy woman ought to be warned that Mr. Raven will not tolerate such characters on his land. Not publicly; privately. Any publicity might do more harm than good—and cause a scandal in the place. Could you carry a message to her, Charity?"

"I'd rather not, ma'am," answered Charity, shrinking back. "The others would never believe but what I was consulting her for myself."

Mrs. Raven hesitated. She feared this woman. Charity Hale lay at the bottom of all the surmises and terrors. But even fear makes a sort of tie. And if all that she dreaded and suspected were true, she scarcely knew whether to regard Charity as a secret ally or an open foe.

"I think it would be best for everybody if she were to be told what would befall her at the Squire's hands, and advised to go quietly away at once," observed Mrs. Raven. "I think I will go to her myself: perhaps this evening. It is, in a way, my duty."

"I should say, ma'am, that will be best—for everybody," answered Charity.

The drawers were arranged by this time. Charity discharged a few more little duties about her mistress's room, and then went away. Nobody saw her again till the servants' dinner hour. Charity usually did her darnings and mendings in her own apartment, holding rather aloof from the comings and goings and general sociability of the servants' hall.

Mrs. Raven did not leave the house all day. When her son was from home she generally took an early dinner, and went out for a stroll after afternoon tea. To-day was to be no exception to this ordinary rule. Mrs. Sims, chatting with the gardener about vegetable prospects, saw the lady walk out for her evening ramble. She was not a woman who stopped to speak with her servants, and a lowering of her thin blue-veined eyelids was her sole recognition of their courtesy and salute.

On she went, past her own lodge, out into the high road, between its green hedges where the leaves were already drooping. Village matrons peeped at her as she passed, and commented on the length of her widow's veil and the paleness of her face. She passed the Vicarage, half wondering to herself whether it might not have been wise to enlist the Reverend Jasper Toynbee in her crusade for the

sake of his ignorant and superstitious flock, and send him to deliver the message she was carrying. Near the church workmen were lingering. There was a sort of shy pathos in their faces as they touched their hats to her—for they were employed on her dead husband's monument.

The Pitchfork was a very homely hostelry, standing behind a row of polled trees on the edge of Raven Green. Its hostess kept cows, and thought a great deal more of them than of her bar. It was but a mild sort of dissipation that went on inside the Pitchfork, or on the heavy seat outside its door; nevertheless, it was much and justly dreaded by village matrons, and had been steadily discountenanced by the late Squire and the Vicar. Therefore the hearts of both Mr. and Mrs. Worsfold failed them when they saw Mrs. Raven making straight for their porch.

"Good evening," she said, coldly; and waited while they respectfully returned the salutation. "I am given to understand you have taken in a lodger who is a kind of fortune-teller. My servants are speaking of her already. You should discourage the presence of such a person on your premises, Worsfold; my son, as you may know, would not like it. I hope you will send her away before the matter reaches his ears."

"She doesn't profess to tell fortunes," said Worsfold in eager apology. "It was only some of my missis's nonsense, wanting to hear things as is better hid. I'll do anything you think right, ma'am: it stands to reason we should consider the Squire's pleasure first of all. But it'll seem queer-like to have to tell the creature to go for doing what we asked her to do."

"There is no need to trouble yourself, good man," interposed the clear hard voice of somebody who was descending the stairs. "The 'creature' is already going: and she is now about to pay you."

With the last words the stranger stood before Mrs. Raven. She was a tall woman, with a fine, strongly-featured face, covered with minute wrinkles, which gave her an appearance of old age inconsistent with her upright figure and vigorous spirit. She was handsomely dressed, without any sign of gaudiness or tawdriness, and yet her garments, like herself, lacked the something which stamps the lady, or even the well-bred, respectable woman. There was a snapping flash in her black eyes; her full lips were straight and tightly drawn; and she carried a small handbag, all the luggage she had brought to the Pitchfork.

Advancing to the counter, she threw down a sovereign and asked for change, which Mrs. Worsfold tremblingly counted out. She entirely ignored Mrs. Raven's existence, though that lady felt that the woman was thoroughly alive to her presence. What strong, masculine hands she had, white and soft, as though with idleness! Mrs. Raven shrank from her in a dread not definable. She shuddered to remember that it was a hidden interest—a personal fear—which had drawn her here, into some sort of relation with this woman.

"Pay yourself well, hostess," said the parting guest, in her deep, harsh tones. "I don't grudge giving you another bit of wisdom before I go," she added as she took the change, "and I'll set it up in rhyme, to pin it into your memory. Listen: it's something so good, that you might repeat it to your vicar:—

"They who wish a thought of ill
Find it easy to fulfil;
When they wish to crush its fruit,
Lo, the several seeds take root;
When with others' sins they twine,
Who need question, 'Mine or thine.'"

Mrs. Raven turned and stepped from the porch before the verse was complete. The Worsfolds felt that she was mortally affronted, and did not wonder at it, seeing the mingling of cool impudence and angry defiance in the woman's manner. She dropped the change into her bag, wished the host and hostess farewell, and strode away in turn. They stood in the porch and watched.

The strange woman overtook Mrs. Raven at the pond, just beyond the polled trees. She passed her, then turned round and stood still, straight in the lady's path.

Mrs. Raven also stood quite still: there was nothing else to do. To attempt to fly would be useless. By a strong effort of will she commanded all her dignity; all that hereditary consciousness of importance and power which had never failed her till within the last few days. Looking at her adversary, she met the cold black eyes gleaming, not like fires, but like knives—met them resolutely. She felt on the edge of the worst—of a worst which she could not fathom—and she rallied in desperation to confront it.

The two women stood so, facing each other for a full minute. Mrs. Raven began to be aware of a horrible sensation of inability to withdraw her gaze. The handsome, repulsive face seemed magically to change beneath it. Elusive memories peeped through it, mocked and vanished. Was her brain giving way? The woman broke into a low metallic laugh.

"Go home, Mrs. Raven," she said; "I have nothing to say to you. Go home, and look in the second drawer of your small toilet set. Take out the covering paper, the top paper, mind, and hold it over your candle—and take warning."

She passed swiftly to the cross roads, and was lost to sight. Mrs. Raven, gazing after her in consternation, pulled her senses together with a shiver. Stumbling along half blindly, she remembered that the last train had left Ravenstoke: where was the woman going?

Worsfold and his wife recollected that, too. But he suggested that "she was one of the sort that could manage fine with a broomstick and the moon."

(To be continued.)

MONKSHOOD.

ALTHOUGH the natural history of plants is no longer confined to those who make the art of simpling their business, but has become a necessary branch of education, it is extraordinary how little people in general know about the flowers they love. It would surprise, and certainly (to use his own familiar expression) would *terrify* the cottager, to be told that the chief ornament of his little plot of garden, his tall, handsome, highly respectable-looking Monkshood is no other than the baleful Aconite, whose name is derived from a Greek word signifying *without a struggle*, and which the early writers say kills man, unless it can find in man something else to kill. Dr. Turner, the father of English botany, calls it "of all poysones the most hastie poyson;" and old Culpepper mentions it in his "British Herbal," simply as a poison, for which he recommends mulberry leaves as an antidote.

Three centuries ago the nature of aconite was accurately understood; and in much earlier days Pliny remarked that it exercises the same effect upon the body that the whetstone does upon the wedge of iron, being no sooner employed than its effects are felt.

Its use and dangers were well known to the ancients, and according to the fables of mythology, it was originally produced from the foam of the dog Cerberus, when dragged by Hercules from the infernal regions—for which reason it is still so remarkably abundant in the vicinity of Heraclea, in Pontus, a spot where is still pointed out the entrance to the shades below.

It is supposed to have been the principal ingredient in the poisonous cup mixed by Medea for Theseus. It was the poison employed in the island of Æos, to execute the barbarous law which condemned to death all who were no longer useful to the state, or were too feeble to defend themselves; whilst, if we descend to modern times, it will be remembered by those interested in the annals of crime, that tincture of aconite was the agent employed by Dr. Pritchard for the murder of his wife and mother-in-law, at Glasgow, in 1865.

In our own days poisoning by the root of aconite is unfortunately by no means infrequent. It has been eaten on several occasions in mistake for horse-radish, and death has usually ensued. All parts of the plant are poisonous, but the root is especially noxious, and when the leaves have fallen it appears to possess its greatest virulence. On chewing a very small portion of either the root or leaves, a sensation of numbness will, after a few minutes, be experienced in the lips and tongue, and will continue for some hours.

The symptoms produced by aconite poisoning are very striking

and sudden : burning and numbness of the lips, mouth, and throat—tremor, pain, and coldness of the limbs. The pulse becomes more and more irregular, and death soon puts an end to the patient's sufferings. The remedies (of which warmth and stimulants are the chief) are to be found in a very useful book just published, which should be ready on the table, or, better still, in the pocket of every medical man.*

Monkshood is only an introduced plant into Britain. It is a native of the Alpine forests of France, Switzerland, and Italy, but it may be found wild in some shady places in Western England and South Wales : it is called in Scotland the castaway of the garden.

Fragments of the root-stock will grow when accidentally thrown into waste places ; and Pliny thinks it derives its name from the circumstance of its growing on the naked rocks known as Aconæ, where there is not so much as dust about it to conduce to its nutriment. The root is perennial, tapering, or spindle-shaped. The flowering stems rise early in the spring, and every vigorous stem terminates in a large, erect, and handsome raceme of violet-purple flowers, irregular in form. The hood is really one of the sepals transformed, and with the nectaries is characteristic of the genus.

Phillips, in his "Vegetable Kingdom," a mine of wealth to the botanist as well as the student of materia medica, describes that even the odour thrown out, when the plant is in full bloom, acts injuriously upon susceptible constitutions, and sometimes causes loss of sight for a day or two. In other instances it has been known to induce fainting fits.

It is found in Sweden, Siberia, and Western Asia, as far as the Himalays, and is much prescribed in every part of India, though it is said that the druggists, calculating on the ignorance of both practitioners and patients respecting the true drug, generally substitute some which they consider an equivalent. The celebrated Indian poison, emphatically called *Bish*, the *poison*, is the root of aconite ferox, which is brought down to the plains of India from the mountains where the plant is indigenous. In all native works, the Bish is represented as being a deadly poison, even in the smallest doses. It is described as being first sweetish, and then followed by a roughness on the tongue, or, as it is expressed in one Hindoo work, *seizing the throat*. It is regarded as equally fatal when taken internally and when applied to wounds : hence its use for poisoning arrows and killing wild animals. So frequent at one time was its employment as a poison, that its sale was prohibited in India, notwithstanding which, the Hindu physicians, noted for the use of powerful drugs, do not hesitate to employ it.

Few remedies are of much more general utility in our own nineteenth century practice. In inflammatory fevers it not only abates the

* "What to Do in Cases of Poisoning." By William Murrell, M.D., M.R.C.P.

frequency of the heart's action, but quickly reduces the temperature. It is valuable in erysipelas, in muscular rheumatism, in gout, in quinsy, in every kind of bad sore throat: but it must be given in the early stage of inflammation, when its power is almost marvellous, and it must always be given alone. It is especially serviceable in that chilliness, aching of the limbs, hot dry skin, and quick pulse which distinguish one of the most trying of troubles, "*a bad cold all over.*"

The formidable poison has been reduced to so manageable a condition that those who have experienced its beneficent properties will gratefully echo the poet's comfortable reflection—

E'en the terror poison
Hath its plea for blooming:
Life it gives to reverend lips, tho' death to the presuming.

C. E. MEETKERKE.



SPRING.

By a thousand subtle signs,
Fading cloud and brightening blue,
By the beauty earth enshrines,
Leaf and grass, and—peeping through—
Flowers of dainty fashioning,
Hither comes the laughing Spring.

Now the birds begin their trill,
New-found joy in every note;
Now the nodding daffodil
Proudly dons his yellow coat,
Like a gallant courtier,
Bending low for love of her.

Slender vine and rugged tree
Smile beneath the touch of Spring;
Through the ice-bound Northern Sea
Runs a thrill of wakening;
And the world is all astir,
Jubilant for love of her.

Banish fear and vain regrets,
Else will life be little worth;
With the fragrant violets
Rouse thee, Hope and harmless Mirth;
All the bliss the year can bring
Hither follow laughing Spring.

SYDNEY GREY.

A MYSTERY.

I SCARCELY know how to go on with this story so as to put its complications and discrepancies of evidence clearly before you. William Brook had been daily expected to land at Liverpool from the West Indies, and to make his way at once to Timberdale by rail, via Birmingham and Worcester.

In the afternoon of the 19th of October, Mrs. James Ashton chanced to be at the Worcester station when the Birmingham train came in. Amidst the passengers who alighted from it she saw William Brook, whom she had known all her life. She was not near enough to speak to him, but she watched him cross the line to the opposite platform, shake hands there with Mr. St. George, and remain talking. Subsequently, Gregory West had met St. George leaving Worcester in his gig, a gentleman sitting with him; it was therefore assumed without doubt that he was driving William Brook to Timberdale, to save him the railway journey and for companionship.

That same evening, at dusk, as we (not knowing that Brook had landed) were returning home from Pigeon Green in the large phaeton, amid a great storm of wind, and slight sleet and snow, Mrs. Todhetley sitting with the Squire in front, Tod and I behind, we passed St. George's gig in Dip Lane; and saw William Brook with him—as we believed, Tod most positively. We called out to Brook, waving our hats; Brook called back to us and waved his.

But now, Mr. St. George denied that it was Brook. He said the gentleman with him was a stranger to whom he had given a lift of three or four miles on the road, and who bore no resemblance to Brook, so far as he saw. Was it Brook, or was it not? asked everybody. If it was Brook, what had become of him? The only one point that seemed to be sure in the matter was this—William Brook had not reached Timberdale.

The following, elaborated, was Mr. St. George's statement.

He, as confidential clerk, soon to be partner, of Mr. Delorane, had a good deal of business to go through that day with Philip West at Worcester, and the afternoon was well on before it was concluded. He then went up to the station at Shrub Hill to inquire after a missing packet of deeds, which had been despatched by rail from Birmingham to Mr. Delorane and as yet could not be heard of. His inquiries over, St. George was traversing the platform on his way to quit the station, when one of the passengers, who had then crossed the line from the Birmingham train, stopped him to ask if he could inform him when the next train would leave for Evesham. "Very shortly," St. George replied, speaking from memory: but even as he spoke a doubt arose in his mind. "Wait a moment," he said to the stranger;

"I am not sure that I am correct"—and he drew from his pocket a time-table and consulted it. There would not be a train for Evesham for more than two hours, he found, one having just gone. The stranger remarked that it was very unfortunate; he had not wanted to wait all that time at Worcester, but to get on at once. The stranger then detained him to ask, apologising for the trouble, and adding that it was the first time he had been in the locality, whether he could get on from Evesham to Cheltenham. St. George told him that he could, but that he could also get on to Cheltenham from Worcester direct. "Ah," remarked the stranger, "but I have to take Evesham on my way." No more passed, and St. George left him on the platform. He appeared to be a gentleman, spoke as a cultured man speaks, St. George added when questioned on these points: and his appearance and attire tallied with that given by Mrs. Ashton. St. George had not observed Mrs. James Ashton on the opposite platform; did not know she was there.

Perceiving, as he left the station, how bad the weather was getting, and what a wild night might be expected, St. George rapidly made up his mind to start for home at once, without waiting for tea at Philip West's or going back at all to the house. He made his way to the Hare-and-Hounds through the back streets, as being the nearest, ordered his gig, and set off—alone—as soon as it was ready. It was then getting dusk; snow was falling in scanty flakes mixed with sleet, and the wind was roaring and rushing like mad.

Gaining the top of Red Hill, St. George was bowling along the level road beyond it, when some wayfarer turned round just before him, put up his hand, and spoke. By the peculiar-coloured coat—a sort of slate—and white comforter, he recognised the stranger of the railway station; he also remembered the voice. "I beg your pardon a thousand times for stopping you," he said, "but I think I perceive that the road branches off two ways yonder: will you kindly tell me which of them will take me to Evesham: there seems to be nobody about on foot that I can inquire of." "That will be your way," St. George answered, pointing with his whip. "But you are not thinking of walking to Evesham to-night, are you!" he added. "It is fifteen miles off."

The stranger replied that he had made up his mind to walk, rather than wait two hours at Worcester station: and St. George was touching his horse to move on, when a thought struck him.

"I am not going the direct Evesham road, but I can give you a lift part of the way," he said. "It will not cut off any of the distance for you, but it will save your legs three or four miles." The stranger thanked him and got up at once, St. George undoing the apron to admit him. He had the same black bag with him that St. George had noticed at the station.

St. George had thus to make a detour to accommodate the stranger. He was by no means unwilling to do it; for, apart from the wish to

help a fellow creature, he believed it would be less rough in the low lying lands. Driving along in the teeth of the furious wind, he turned off the highway and got into Dip Lane.—We saw him in it, the stranger sitting with him.—He drove on after we had passed, pulled up at the proper place for the man to descend, and pointed out the route. "You have got a mile or two of these byways," he said to him, "but keep straight on and they will bring you out into the open road. Turn to your left then, and you will gain Evesham in time—and I wish you well through your walk."

Those were St. George's exact words—as he repeated to us later. The stranger thanked him heartily, shook hands and went on his way, carrying his black bag. St. George said that before parting with the traveller, he suggested that he should go on with him to Timberdale, seeing the night was so cold and wild, put up at the Plough-and-Harrow, where he could get a comfortable bed, and go on to Evesham in the morning. But the stranger declined, and seemed impatient to get on.

He did not tell St. George who he was, or what he was; he did not tell his name, or what his business was in Worcestershire, or whether he was purposing to make a stay at Evesham, or whither he might be going when he left it: unless the question he had put to St. George, as to being able to get on to Cheltenham, might be taken for an indication of his route. In fact, he stated nothing whatever about himself; but, as St. George said, the state of the weather was against talking. It was difficult to hear each other speak; the blasts howled about their ears perpetually, and the sharp sleet stung their faces. As to his bearing the resemblance to Brook that was being talked of, St. George could only repeat that he did not perceive it; he might have been about Brook's height and size, but that was all. The voice was certainly not Brook's, not in the least like Brook's, neither was the face, so far as St. George saw of it: no idea of the kind struck him.

These were the different statements: and, reading them, you have the matter in a nutshell. Mrs. James Ashton continued to affirm that it was William Brook she saw at the station, and could not be shaken out of her belief. She and William had played together as children, they had flirted together, she was pleased to declare, as youth and maiden, and *did* anybody suppose she could mistake an unknown young man for him in broad daylight? An immense favourite with all the world, Marianne Ashton was fond of holding decisively to her own opinions; all her words might have begun with capital letters.

I also maintained that the young man we saw in St. George's gig in Dip Lane, and who wore a warm great coat of rather an unusual colour, something of a grey—or a slate—or a mouse, with the white woollen comforter on his neck and the soft low-crowned hat drawn well on his brows, was William Brook. When he took off his hat

to wave it to us in response, I saw (as I fully believed) that it was Brook ; and I noticed his gloves. Mrs. Todhetley, who had turned her head at our words, also saw him and felt not the slightest doubt that it was he. Tod was ready to swear to it.

To combat this, we had Mr. St. George's cool, calm, decisive assertion that the man was a stranger. Of course it outweighed ours. All the probabilities lay with it ; he had been in companionship with the stranger, had talked with him face to face : we had not. Besides, if it had been Brook, where was he that he had not made his way to Timberdale ? So we took up the common-sense view of the matter and dismissed our own impressions as fancies that would not hold water, and looked out daily for the landing of the exile. Aunt Hester hoped he was not "lost at sea : " but she did not say it in the hearing of Ellin Delorane.

The days went on. November came in. William Brook did not appear to land ; no tidings reached us of him. His continued non-appearance so effectually confirmed St. George's statement, that the other idea was exploded and forgotten by all reasonable minds. Possibly in one or two unreasonable ones, such as mine, say, a sort of hazy doubt might still hover. But, doubt of what ? Ay, that was the question. Even Tod veered round to the enemy, said his sight must have misled him, and laid the blame on the wind. Both common sense and uncommon said Brook had but been detained in Jamaica, and might be expected in any day.

The first check to this security of expectation was wrought by a letter. A letter from New York, addressed to William Brook by his brother there, Charles. Mrs. Brook opened it. She was growing vaguely uneasy, and had already begun to ask herself why, were William detained in the West Indies, he did not write to tell her so.

And this, as it proved, was the chief question the letter was written to ask. "If," wrote Charles Brook to his brother, "if you have arrived at home—as we conclude you must have done, having seen in the papers the safe arrival of the Dart at Liverpool—how is it you have not written to say so, and to inform us how things are progressing. The uncle does not like it. 'Is William getting negligent ? ' he said to me yesterday."

The phrase "how things are progressing," Mrs. Brook understood to apply to the new mercantile house about to be established in London. She sent the letter by Araminta to Mr. Delorane.

"Can William have been drowned at sea !" breathed Minty.

"No, no ; I don't fear that ; I'm not like that silly woman, Aunt Hester, with her dreams and her fancies," said Mr. Delorane. "It seems odd, though, where he can be."

Inquiries were made at Liverpool for the list of passengers by the Dart. William Brook's name was not amidst them. Timberdale waited on. There was nothing else for it to do. Waited until a

second letter came from Charles Brook. It was written to his mother this time. He asked for news of William; whether he had, or had not, arrived at home.

The next West Indian mail packet, steaming from Southampton, carried out a letter from Mr. St. George, written to his cousin in Kingston, Jamaica, at the desire of Mr. Delorane: at the desire, it may with truth be said, of Timberdale in general. The same mail also took out a letter from Reginald Brook in London; who had been made acquainted with the trouble. Both letters were to the same purport—an inquiry as to William Brook and his movements, more particularly as to the time he had departed for home, and the vessel he had sailed in.

In six or eight weeks, which seemed to some of us like so many months, Mr. St. George got an answer. His relative, Leonard St. George, sent rather a curious story. He did not know anything of William Brook's movements himself, he wrote, and could not gain much reliable information about them. It appeared that he was to have sailed for England in the *Dart*, a steamer bound for Liverpool, not one of their regular passenger packets. He was unable, however, to find any record that Brook had gone in her, and believed he had not: neither could he learn that Brook had departed by any other vessel. A friend of his told him that he feared Brook was dead. The day before the *Dart* went out of port, a young man, who bore out in every respect the description of Brook, was drowned in the harbour.

Comforting news! Delightfully comforting for Ellin Delorane, not to speak of Brook's people. Aunt Hester came over to Crabb Cot, and burst into tears as she told it.

But the next morning brought a turn in the tide; one less sombre, though uncertain still. Mrs. Brook, who had bedewed her pillow with salt tears, for her youngest son was very dear to her heart, received a letter from her son Reginald in London, enclosing one he had just got from the West Indies. She brought them to Mr. Delorane's office during the morning, and the Squire and I happened to be there.

"How should Reginald know anything about it?" demanded St. George, in the haughty manner he could put on when not pleased; and his countenance looked dark as he gazed across his desk at Mrs. Brook, for which I saw no occasion. Evidently he did not like to have his brother's news disputed.

"Reginald wrote to Kingston by the same mail that you wrote," she said. "He got an introduction to some mercantile firm out there, and this is their answer to him."

They stated, these merchants, that they had made due inquiries according to request, and found that William Brook had secured a passage on board the *Dart*; but that, finding himself unable to go in her, his business in Kingston not being finished, he had, at the

last moment, made over his berth and ticket to another gentleman, who found himself called upon to sail unexpectedly: and that he, Brook, had departed by the *Idalia*, which left two days later than the *Dart* and was also bound for Liverpool.

"I have ascertained here, dear mother," wrote Reginald from London, "that the *Idalia* made a good passage and reached Liverpool on the 18th of October. If the statement which I enclose you be correct, that William left Jamaica in her, he must have arrived in her at Liverpool, unless he died by the way. It is very strange where he can be, and what can have become of him. Of course, inquiries must now be made in Liverpool. I only wish I could go down myself, but our patients are all on my hands just now, for Dr. Croft is ill."

The first thought, flashing into the mind of Mr. Delorane, was, that the 18th of October was the eve of the day on which William Brook was said to have been seen by Mrs. James Ashton. He paused to consider, a sort of puzzled doubt on his face.

"Why, look you here," cried he quickly, "it seems as though that *was* Brook at Worcester station. If he reached Liverpool on the 18th, the probabilities are that he would be at Worcester on the 19th. What do you make of it?"

We could not make anything. Mrs. Brook looked pale and distressed. The Squire, in his impulsive good-nature, offered to be the one to go, off-hand, to make the inquiries at Liverpool. St. George opposed this: *he* was the proper person to go, he said; but Mrs. Delorane reminded him that he could be ill-spared just then when the assizes were at hand. For the time had gone on to spring.

"I will start to-night," said the Squire, "and take Johnny with me. My time is my own. We will turn Liverpool upside down but what we find Brook—if he is to be found on earth."

That the Squire might have turned Liverpool "upside down" with the confusion of his inquiries was likely enough, only that Jack Tanerton was there, having brought his own good ship, the *Rose of Delhi*, into port but a few days before. Jack and William Brook had been boys together, and Jack took up the cause in warm-hearted zeal. His knowledge of the town and its shipping made our way plain before us. That is, as plain as a way can be made which seems to have neither inlet nor outlet.

The *Idalia* was then lying in the Liverpool docks, not long in again from the West Indies. We ascertained that William Brook had come in her the previous autumn, making the port of Liverpool on the 18th of October.

"Then nothing happened to him half-way?" cried the Squire to the second mate, a decent sort of fellow who did all he could for us. "He was not lost, or—or—anything of that?"

"Why no," said the mate, looking surprised. "He was all right

the whole of the voyage and in first-rate spirits—a very nice young fellow altogether. The *Idalia* brought him home, all taut and safe, take our word for that, sir; and he went ashore with the rest, and his luggage also: of which he had but little; just a big case and the small one that was in his cabin."

All this was certain. But from the hour Brook stepped ashore, we were unable to trace anything certain about him. The hotels could not single him out in memory from other temporary sojourners. I think it was by no means a usual occurrence in those days for passing guests to give in their names. Anyway, we found no record of Brook's. The railway porters remembered no more of him than the hotels—and it was hardly likely they would.

Captain Tanerton—to give Jack his title—was indefatigable; winding himself in and out of all kinds of places like a detective eel. In some marvellous way he got to learn that a gentleman whose appearance tallied with Brook's had bought some tan-coloured kid gloves and also a white comforter in a shop in Bold Street on the morning of the 19th of October. Jack took us there that we might question the people, especially the young woman who served him. She said that, while choosing the gloves, he observed that he had just come off a sea voyage and found the weather here very chilly. He wore a lightish great-coat, a sort of slate or grey. She was setting out the window when he came in, and had to leave it to serve him; it was barely eight o'clock, and she remarked to him that he was shopping betimes; he replied yes, for he was going off directly by train. He bought two pair of the gloves, putting one pair of them on in the shop; he next bought a warm knitted woollen scarf, white, and put on that. She was quite certain it was the 19th of October, and told us why she could not be mistaken. And that was the last trace we could get of Brook in Liverpool.

Well, well; it is of no use to linger. We went away from Liverpool, the Squire and I, no better off than we were when we entered it. That William Brook had arrived safely by the *Idalia*, and that he had landed safely, appeared to be a fact indisputable: but after that time he seemed to have vanished into air. Unless, mark you, it was he who had come on to Worcester.

The most concerned of all at our ill-luck was Mr. St. George. He had treated the matter lightly when thinking Brook was but lingering over the seas; now that it was proved he returned by the *Idalia*, the case was different.

"I don't like it at all," he said to the Squire frankly. "People may begin to think it was really Brook I had with me that night, and ask me what I did with him."

"What could you have done with him?" dissented the Squire.

"Not much—that I see. I couldn't pack him up in a parcel to be sent back over seas, and I couldn't bury him here. I wish with all my heart it had been Brook! I'll not leave a stone unturned

now but what I find him," added St. George, his eyes flashing, his face flushing hotly. "Anyway, I'll find the man who was with me."

St. George set to work. Making inquiries here, there and everywhere for William Brook, personally and by advertising. But little came of it. A porter at the Worcester railway station, who had seen the traveller talking with St. George on the platform, came forward to state that they (the gentleman and Mr. St. George) had left the station together, walking away from it side by side, down the road. St. George utterly denied this. He admitted that the other might have followed him so closely as to impart a possible appearance of their being together, but if so, he was not conscious of it. Just as he had denied shaking hands with the stranger, which Mrs. James Ashton insisted upon.

Next a lady came forward. She had travelled from Birmingham that afternoon, the 19th of October, with her little nephew and niece. In the same compartment, a first-class one, was another passenger, bearing, both in attire and person, the description told of—a very pleasant, gentlemanly young man, nice-looking, eyes dark blue. It was bitterly cold: he seemed to feel it greatly, and said he had recently come from a warmer climate. He also said that he ought to have got into Worcester by an earlier train, but had been detained in Birmingham, through missing his luggage, which he supposed must have been put out by mistake at some intermediate station. He had with him a small black hand-bag; nothing else that she saw. His great-coat was of a peculiar shade of grey; it did not look like an English-made coat; his well-fitting kid gloves were of fawn (or tan) colour, and appeared to be new. Once, when the high wind seemed to shake the carriage, he remarked with a smile that one might almost as well be at sea; upon which her little nephew said: "Have you ever been to sea, sir?" "Yes, my little lad," he answered; "I landed from it only yesterday."

The only other person to come forward was a farmer named Lockett, well known to us all. He lived on the Evesham road, close upon the turning, or byway, which led up from Dip Lane. On the night of the storm, the 19th of October, he went out about ten o'clock to visit a neighbour, who had met with a bad accident. In passing by this turning, a man came out of it, walking pretty sharply. He looked like a gentleman, seemed to be muffled up round the neck, and carried something in his hand; whether a black bag, or not, Mr. Lockett did not observe. "A wild night," said the farmer to him in salutation. "It is that," answered the other. He took the road to Evesham, and Mr. Lockett saw him no more. St. George was delighted at this evidence. He could have hugged old Lockett. "I knew that the truth would be corroborated sooner or later," he said, his eyes sparkling. "That was the man I put out of my gig in Dip Lane."

"Stop a bit," cried Mr. Delorane, a doubt striking him. "If it

was the same man, what had he been doing to take two or three hours to get into the Evesham road? Did he bear any resemblance to William Brook, Lockett?—you would have known Brook.”

“None at all that I saw. As to knowing Brook, or anybody else, I can’t answer for it on such a night as that,” added the farmer after a pause. “Brook would have known me, though, I take it, daylight or dark, seeing me close to my own place, and all.”

“It was the other man,” affirmed St. George exultantly, “and now we will find him.”

An advertisement was next inserted in the local newspapers by Mr. St. George, and also in the *Times*.

“Gentleman Wanted. The traveller who got out of the Birmingham train at Worcester railway station on the 19th of last October, towards the close of the afternoon, and who spoke to a gentleman on the platform respecting the trains to Evesham and to Cheltenham, and who was subsequently overtaken a little way out of Worcester by the same gentleman and given a few miles’ lift in his gig, and was put down in a cross-country lane to continue his walk to Evesham: this traveller is earnestly requested to give an address where he may be communicated with, to Alfred St. George, Esquire, Timberdale, Worcester. By doing so, he will be conferring a great favour.”

For two long weeks the advertisements brought forth no reply. At the end of that time there came to Mr. St. George a post-letter, short and sweet.

“Tell me what I am wanted for.—R. W.”

It was dated Post Office, Cheltenham. To the Post Office, Cheltenham, St. George, consulting with Mr. Delorane, wrote a brief explanation. That he (R. W.) had been mistaken by some people who saw him that night in the gig, for a gentleman named Brook, a native of Timberdale, who had been missing since about that time. This, as R. W. might perceive, was not pleasant for himself, St. George; and he begged R. W. to come forward and set the erroneous idea at rest, or to state where he could be seen. Expenses, if any, would be cheerfully paid.

This letter brought forth the following answer:—

“Dear Sir,—I regret that your courtesy to me that stormy night should have led to misapprehension. I the more regret it that I am not able to comply with your request to come forward. At present that is impossible. The truth is, I am, and have been for some months now, lying under a cloud, partly through my own credulous fault, chiefly through the designing faults of another man, and I dare not show myself. It may be many more months yet before I am cleared: that I shall be, in time, there exists no doubt of, and I shall then gladly bear personal testimony to the fact that it was I myself who was with you. Meanwhile, perhaps the following statement will suffice: which I declare upon my honour to be true.

“I was hiding at Crewe, when I got a letter from a friend at Eve-

sham, bidding me to go to him without delay. I had no scruple in complying, not being known at all in Worcestershire, and I started by one of the Liverpool trains. I had a portmanteau with me containing papers principally, and this I missed on arriving at Birmingham. The looking for it caused me to lose the Worcester train, but I went on by the next. Upon getting out there, I addressed the first person I saw after crossing the line—yourself. I inquired of you when the next train would start for Evesham. Not for two hours, you told me: so I set off to walk, after getting some light refreshment. Barely had I left Worcester when, through the evening's dusk, I thought I saw that the road before me branched off two ways. I did not know which to take, and ventured to stop a gig, then bowling up behind me, to ask. As you answered me I recognised you for the gentleman to whom I had spoken at the station. You offered to take me a few miles on my road, and I got into the gig. I found that you would have to go out of your way to do this, and I expressed concern; you laughed my apologies off, saying you should probably have chosen the way in any case, as it was more sheltered. You drove me as far as your road lay, told me that after I got out of the cross lanes my way would be a straight one, and I left you with hearty thanks—which I repeat now. I may as well tell you that I got to Evesham without mishap—in process of time. The storm was so bad, the wind so fierce, that I was fain to turn out of the lane close upon leaving you, and shelter myself for an hour or two under a hay-rick, hoping it would abate. How it was possible for mortal man to see enough of me that night in your gig to mistake me for somebody else, I am at a loss to understand. I remember that carriage passing us in the narrow lane, the people in it shouted out to you: it must have been they, I conclude, who mistook me, for I do not think we saw another soul. You are at full liberty to show them this letter: but I must ask you not to make it absolutely public. I have purposely elaborated its details. I repeat my sacred declaration that every word of it is true—and I do heartily regret that I cannot yet testify to it personally.—R. W."

This letter set the matter at rest. We never doubted it was genuine, or aught but a plain narrative of absolute facts. But the one great question remained—where was William Brook?

It was not answered. The disappearance, which had been a mystery at the beginning, seemed likely to remain a mystery to the end.

Another autumn had come round. Ellin Delorane, feeble now, sat in the church porch, the graveyard lying around her under the hot September sun, soon herself to be laid there. Chancing to take that way round from buying some figs at Salmon's for Hugh and Lena, I saw her, and dashed up the churchyard path.

"You seem to have set up a love for this lively spot, Ellin! You were sitting here the last time I passed by."

"The sun is hot yet, and I get tired, so I come across here for a

rest when out this way," she answered, a sweet smile on her wan face and a red hectic on her thin cheeks. "Won't you stay with me for a little while, Johnny."

"Are you better, Ellin?" I asked, taking my place on the opposite bench, which brought my knees near to hers, for the porch was not much more than big enough for a coffin to pass through.

She gently shook her head as she glanced across at me, a steadfast look in her sad brown eyes. "Don't you see how it is, Johnny? That I shall never be better in this world?"

"Your weakness may take a turn, Ellin; it may indeed. And—he may come back yet."

"He will never come back: rely upon that," she quietly said.

"He is waiting for me on the Eternal shores."

Her gaze went out afar, over the gravestones and the green meadows beyond, almost (one might fancy) into the blue skies, as if she could see those shores in the distant horizon.

"Is it well to lose hope, Eileen mavourneen?"

"The hope of his returning died out long ago," she answered. "Those dreams that visited me so strangely last year, night after night, night after night, seemed to take *that* from me. Perhaps they came to do it. You remember them, Johnny."

"I cannot think, Ellin, how you could put faith in a parcel of dreams!"

"It was not in the dreams I put faith—exactly. It was in the mysterious influence—I hope I don't speak profanely—which caused me to have the dreams. A silent, undetected influence that I understood not and never grasped—but it was there. Curious dreams they were," she added, after a pause; "curious that they should have come to me. William was always lost, and I, with others, was always searching for him—and never, never found him. They lasted, Johnny, for weeks and months; and almost from the time of their first setting-in, the impression, that I should never see him again, lay latent in my heart."

"Do they visit you still?"

"No. At least, they have changed in character. Ever since the night that he seems to have been really lost, the 19th of October. How you look at me, Johnny!"

"You speak so strangely."

"The subject is strange. I was at Worcester, you know, at Mary West's, and we thought he had come. That night I had the pleasantest dream. We were no longer seeking for him; all the anxiety, the distress of that was gone. We saw him; he seemed to be with us—though yet at a distance. When I awoke, I said in my happiness, 'Ah, those sad dreams will visit me no more, now he is found.' I thought he was, you see. Since then, though the dreams continue, he is never lost in them. I see him always; we are often talking, though we are never very close together. I will be indoors, perhaps, and he

outside in the garden ; or maybe I am toiling up a steep hill and he stands higher up. I seem to be *always going towards* him and he to be waiting for me. And though I never quite reach him, they are happy dreams. It will not be very long first now."

I knew what she meant—and had nothing to say to it.

"Perhaps it may be as well, Johnny," she went on in speculative thought. "God does all things for the best."

"Perhaps what may be as well?"

"That he should never have come back to marry me. I do not suppose I should have lived long in any case ; I am too much like mamma. And to have been left a widower—perhaps—no, it is best as it is."

"You don't give yourself a chance of getting better, Ellin—cherishing these gloomy views."

"Gloomy ! They are not gloomy. I am as happy as I can be. I often picture to myself the glories of the world I am hastening to ; the lovely flowers, the trees that overshadow the banks of the pure crystal river, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, and the beautiful golden light shed around us by God and the Lamb. Oh, Johnny, what a rest it will be after the weary sorrow here—and the weakness—and the pain !"

"But you should not wish to leave us before your time."

"I do not wish it ; it is God who is taking me. I think if I had a wish it would be to stay here as long as papa stays. For I know what my death will be to him. And what it will be to you all," she generously added, holding out her hands to me, as the tears filled her eyes.

I held them for a minute in mine. Ellin took up her parasol, preparatory to moving away ; but laid it down again.

"Johnny, tell me—I have often thought I should like to ask you—what do *you* think could have become of William ? Have you ever picked up an idea, however faint, of aught that could tend to solve the mystery ?"

It was a hard question to answer, and she saw my hesitation.

"I cannot admit that I have, Ellin. When looking at the affair in one light, I whisper to myself 'It might have been this way ;' when looking at it in another, I say 'It might have been that.' Difficulties and contradictions encompass it on all sides. One impediment to elucidation was the length of time that elapsed before we began the search in earnest. Had we known from the first that he was really lost, and gone to work then, we might have had a better chance."

Ellin nodded assent. "Marianne Ashton still maintains that it was William she saw that day at the railway station."

"I know she does. She always will maintain it."

"Has it ever struck you, Johnny, in how rather remarkable a way any proof that it was he, or not he, seems to have been withheld?"

"Well, we could not get at any positive proof, one way or the other."

"But I mean that proof seems to *have been withheld*," repeated Ellin. "Take, to begin with, the traveller's luggage: but for its being lost (and we do not know that it was ever found), the name, sure to have been on it, would have told whether its owner was William Brook, or not. Then take Marianne Ashton: had she gained the platform but a few seconds earlier, she would have met the traveller face to face, avoiding all possibility of mistake either way. Next take the meeting of the two gigs that evening when Gregory West was returning from Spetchley. Gregory, a stranger to Worcester until recently, did not know William Brook; but had Philip West himself gone to Spetchley—as he ought to have done—he would have known him. Again, had Philip's groom, Brian, been there, he would have known him: he comes from this neighbourhood, you know. Brian was going with the gig that afternoon, but just as it was starting Philip got a message from a client living at Lower Wick, and he had to send Brian with the answer, so Gregory went alone. You must see how very near proof was in all these moments, yet it was withheld."

Of course I saw it. And there was yet another instance: Had the Squire only pulled up when we passed the gig in Dip Lane, instead of driving on like the wind, we should have had proof that it was, or was not, Brook.

"If it was he," breathed Ellin, "it must have been that night he died. He would not, else, keep away from Timberdale."

My voice dropped to a lower key than hers. "Ellin! Do you really think it was he with St. George?"

"Oh, I cannot say that. If any such thought intrudes itself, I drive it away. I do not like St. George, but I would not be unjust to him."

"I thought St. George was one of your prime favourites."

"He was never that. He used to be very kind to me, especially after William went away, and I liked him for it. But latterly I have taken a most unreasonable dislike to him—and really without any justifiable cause. He worries me—but it is not that."

"Worries you!"

"In pressing me to be his wife," she sighed. "Of course I ought to be grateful: he tells me, he tells papa, that with a new life and new scenes, which he would carry me to, my health might be re-established. Poor papa! Only the other day he said to me, 'My dear, don't you think you might bring yourself to try it,' and I was so silly as to burst into tears. The tears came into papa's eyes too, and he promised never to suggest it to me again."

The tears were trickling down her cheeks, now as she spoke. "What a world of crosses and contradiction it is," she cried, smiling through them as she rose. "And, Johnny, all this is between ourselves, remember."

Yes, it was between ourselves. We strolled across the churchyard to a tomb that stood in a corner facing the western sun. It was of

white marble, aromatic shrubs encircling it within ornamental railings, and an inscription on it to her who lay beneath :

"Maria, the beloved wife of John Delorane."

Ellin lingered on through the frosts of winter. Except that she grew thinner and weaker and her cheeks brighter, there really did not seem to be much the matter. Darbyshire saw her every day, other medical men occasionally, but they could not save her. When the snowdrops were peeping from the ground, and the violets nestled in their mossy shelters, and the trees and hedges began to show signs of budding, tokens of the renewal of life after the death of winter, Ellin passed away to that other life, where there is no death and the flowers bloom for ever. And another inscription was added to the white tombstone in the churchyard :

"Ellin Maria, the only child of John and Maria Delorane."

"You should have seen St. George at the funeral," said Tom Coney to us, as we turned aside after church one hot summer's day to look at the new name on the grave, for we were away from Crabb Cot when she died. "His face was green; yes, green—hold your tongue, Johnny!—green, not yellow; and his eyes had the queerest look. You were right, Todhetley; you used to say, you know, that St. George was wild after poor Ellin."

"Positive of it," affirmed Tod.

"And he can't bear the place now she's gone out of it," continued Tom Coney. "Report says that he means to throw up his post and his prospects, and run away for good."

"Not likely," dissented Tod, tossing his head. "A strong man like St. George does not die of love now-a-days, or put himself out of good things, either. You have been reading romances, Coney."

But Tom Coney was right. When the summer was on the wane St. George bade a final adieu to Timberdale. And if it was his love for Ellin, or her death, that drove him away, he made no mention of it. He told Timberdale that he was growing tired of work and meant to travel. As he had a good income, Timberdale agreed that it was only natural he should grow tired of work and want to travel. So he said adieu, and departed: and Mr. Delorane speedily engaged another head clerk in his place, who was to become his partner later.

St. George wrote to Mr. Delorane from Jamaica, to which place he steamed first, to take a look at his cousins. The letter contained a few words about William Brook. St. George had been instituting inquiries, and he said that, by what he could learn, it was certainly William Brook who was drowned in Kingston harbour the day before he ought to have sailed for England in the Dart. He, St. George, felt perfectly assured of this fact, and also that if any man had sailed in the Idalia under Brook's name, it must have been an impostor who had nefariously substituted himself. St. George added that he was

going "farther afield," possibly to California: he would write again from thence if he arrived without mishap.

No other letter ever came from him. So whether the sea swallowed him up, as, according to his report, it had swallowed his rival, none could tell. But it would take better evidence than that, to convince us William Brook had not come home in the *Idalia*.

And that is all I have to tell. I know you will deem it most unsatisfactory. Was it William Brook in the gig, or was it not? We found no trace of him after that stormy night: we have found none to this day. And, whether that was he, or was not he, what became of him? Questions never, as I believe, to be solved in this life.

There was a peculiar absence of proof every way, as Ellin remarked; nothing but doubt on all sides. Going over the matter with Darbyshire the other evening, when, as I have already told you, he suggested that I should relate it, we could not, either of us, see daylight through it, any more than we saw it at the time of its occurrence.

There was the certainty (yes, I say so) that Brook landed at Liverpool the evening of the 18th of October; he would no doubt start for home the morning of the 19th, by rail, which would take him through Birmingham to Worcester; there was also what the shopwoman in Bold Street said, though hers might be called negative testimony, as well as the lady's in the train. There was Mrs. James Ashton's positive belief that she saw him arrive that afternoon at Worcester by the Birmingham train, *shake hands* with St. George and talk with him: and there was our recognition of him an hour or two later in St. George's gig in Dip Lane —

"Hold there, Johnny," cried Darbyshire, taking his long clay pipe from his mouth to interrupt me as I went over the items. "You should say *supposed* recognition."

"Yes, of course. Well, all that points to its having been Brook: you must see that, Mr. Darbyshire. But, if it was in truth he, there's a vast deal that seems inexplicable. Why did he set off to *walk* from Worcester to Timberdale—and on such a night!—why not have gone on by rail? It is incredible."

"Nay, lad, we are told he—that is, the traveller—set off to walk to Evesham. St. George says he put him down in Dip Lane; and Lockett, you know, saw somebody, that seems to answer the description, turn from the lanes into the Evesham road."

I was silent, thinking out my thoughts. Or, rather, not daring to think them out. Darbyshire put his pipe in the fender and went on.

"If it was Brook and no stranger that St. George met at Worcester station, the only possible theory I can form on that point is this, Johnny: that St. George then proposed to drive him home. He may have said to him, 'You walk on, and I will get my gig and overtake you directly: it is a lame theory, you may say, lad, but it is the only one I can discern, and I have thought of the matter more than you

suppose. St. George started for home earlier than he had meant to start, and this may have been the reason: though *he* says it was because he saw it was going to be so wild a night. Why they should not have gone in company to the Hare-and-Hounds, and started thence in the gig together, is another question."

"Unless Brook, being done up, wished not to show himself at Worcester that day—to get on at once to Timberdale."

Darbyshire nodded: the thought, I am sure, was not strange to him. "The most weighty question of all remains yet, lad: If St. George took up Brook in his gig, what did he do with him? *He* would not want to be put down in Dip Lane to walk to Evesham."

He caught up his churchwarden pipe, relighted it at the fire, and puffed away in silence. Presently I spoke again.

"Mr. Darbyshire, I do not like St. George. I never did. You may not believe me, perhaps, but the first time I ever saw his face—I was a little fellow—I drew back startled. There was something in its expression which frightened me."

"One of your unreasonable dislikes, Johnny?"

"Are they unreasonable? But I have not taken many such dislikes in my life as that one was. Perhaps I might say *any* such."

"St. George was liked by most people."

"I know he was. Anyway, my dislike remained with me. I never spoke of it; no, not even to Tod."

"Liking him or disliking him has nothing to do with the main question—what became of Brook. There were the letters too, sent by the traveller in answer to St. George's advertisements."

"Yes, there were the letters. But—did it ever occur to you to notice that not one word was said in those letters, or one new fact given, that we had not heard before? They bore out St. George's statement, but they afforded no proof that his statement was true."

"That is, Mr. Johnny, you would insinuate, putting it genteelly, that St. George fabricated the answers himself."

"No, not that he did, only that there was nothing in the letters to render it impossible that he did."

"After having fabricated the pretty little tale that it was a stranger he picked up, and what the stranger said to him, and all the rest of it, eh, Johnny?"

"Well"—I hesitated—"as to the letters, it seemed to me to be an unaccountable thing that the traveller could not let even one person see him in private, to hear his personal testimony: say Mr. Delorane, or a member of the Brook family. The Squire went hot over it: he asked St. George whether the fellow thought men of honour carried handcuffs in their pockets. Again, the stranger said he should be at liberty to come forward later, but he never has come."

Darbyshire smoked on. "I'd give this full of gold," he broke the silence with, touching the big bowl of the clay pipe, "to know where Brook vanished to."

My restless fingers had strayed to his old leaden tobacco jar, on the table by me, pressing down its heavy lid and lifting it again. When I next spoke he might have thought the words came out of the tobacco, they were so low.

"Do you think St. George had a grudge against Brook, Mr. Darbyshire?—that he wished him out of the way?"

Darbyshire gave me a look through the wreathing smoke. "Speak out, lad. What have you on your mind?"

"St. George said, you know, that he stopped the gig in Dip Lane at the turning which would lead to Evesham, for Brook—I mean the traveller—to get out. But I thought I heard it stop before that. I was almost sure of it."

"Stop where?"

"Just about opposite the gap in the hedge; hardly even quite as far as that. We had not reached the turning to Evesham ourselves when I heard this. The gig seemed to come to a sudden standstill. I said so to Tod at the time."

"Well?"

"Why should he have stopped just at the gap?"

"How can I tell, lad?"

"I suppose he could not have damaged Brook? Struck him a blow to stun him—or—or anything of that?"

"And if he had? If he (let us put it so) *killed* him, Johnny, what did he do with—what was left of him? What could he do with it?"

Darbyshire paused in his smoking. I played unconsciously with the jar. He was looking at me, waiting to be answered.

"I suppose—if that pond had been dragged—Dip Pond—if it were to be dragged now—that—that—nothing would be found——"

"Hush, lad," struck in Darbyshire, all hastily. "Walls have ears, people tell us: and we must not even whisper grave charges without sufficient grounds; grounds that we could substantiate."

True: and of course he did right to stop me.

But we cannot stay rebellious thought: and no end of gruesome ideas connected with that night in Dip Lane steal creepingly at times into my mind. If I am not mistaken they steal also into Darbyshire's.

All the same they may be but phantoms of the imagination, and St. George may have been a truthful, an innocent man. You must decide for yourselves, if you can, on which side the weight of evidence seems to lie. I have told you the story as it happened, and I cannot clear up for you what has never yet been cleared for Timberdale. It remains an unsolved mystery.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

IN THE BLACK FOREST.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"ROUND ABOUT NORWAY," &c.



WE left Allerheiligen in the early morning. The summits of the trees were gilded with a celestial light that threw the lower portions of the valley into yet deeper shadow. The good people in the breakfast-room, in all stages of *déshabille*, looked after the receding equipage until a turn of the road took it from sight as we wound upwards into the splendid forest gloom, with its intense solitude. Many shades of green refreshed the eye from the springing shrubs and bracken, the trees alone faith-

ful to their own sad tone. Presently, sweeping down again, we crossed a bridge at the foot of the zig-zag fall formed by the waters of the Grindenbach, and rejoicing in the name of the "Seven Cauldrons." The narrow cleft through which it rushes was the effect of an earthquake; certainly so wild, distorted a fissure and mass of rocks could scarcely have been the result of anything less than a convulsion of nature. Finally we passed from the precincts of Allerheiligen, and, like a ship clear of her anchor, felt ourselves fairly under way.

For a time that way led through a wild, narrow valley. On either side nothing seen but a wealth of pine-covered hills; nothing heard but the murmur of a stream, and the soft rustling of the wind in the waving trees. The sad green blended with the pure blue of the far-off sky, so high, so ethereal in this rarefied pine-scented air. The glowing sun, by kissing the swaying branches, did his utmost to turn their melancholy into laughter. But, journeying in broad daylight, this melancholy casts no gloom upon the mind of the traveller. Rather it sheds forth a repose grateful to the eye, restoring to the nerves, refreshing to the spirit. Soon you grow to love the pines, "with a mute affection;" to miss them where they are not. After a day or two's sojourn in a Black Forest town, you long for the wild freedom of the woods, their unrestrained influences, their long, love

vistas, chequered by deep lights and shadows; above all, their grand, restful solitudes—the latter a feature that should be made conspicuous by reiteration.

To all wanting change of scene, tired with town life—wearying from its very superabundance—the Black Forest offers healing influences of a sure kind. Especially it commends itself to the pedestrian. With a companion, rather than alone, to break the monotony of silence, and to share his impressions, he may throw himself into the shady depths during the scorching mid-day hour, and while away the time in a thousand fancies. In such gratefully cool retreat he will revel in the pine scents, the pure air, the deep silence, the flashes of blue sky that open and close as the trees above him sway in the wind. All the while his delicious rest and reveries are undisturbed, unbroken, unmolested by intrusion. Health is taken in with every passing hour; troubles (show me the happy man without them) fall off and are forgotten; he enters into the purest happiness, of a selfish sort, that exists.

We passed through a narrow, wooded valley for a considerable distance, until, at Oppenau, the hills opened out and became more fertile. This morning it was a smiling, sunny valley, all lights and shades. Oppenau seemed a thriving little town, and like some others in the Forest, was destroyed by the French in the seventeenth century. We clattered noisily through the long street bordered by white houses, with their gabled roofs and green shutters: a noise that never fails to bring the good folk with haste to their doors. For curiosity is not confined to one particular people or country, but seems indigenous to the feminine element of all nations.

We did not stay to gratify any curiosity beyond a mere gaze and a wonder, but hurried on towards Petersthal. Here we are in the region of the "Kniebis Baths," a colony of watering-places much frequented, and quite fashionable in their way during the summer season. People come to drink the waters, a combination of iron and carbonic acid gas, not particularly agreeable to the taste. But what will not man go through to heal real or imaginary ills? The hypochondriac, indeed, is most of all to be pitied, for his ills are beyond remedy. "You cannot minister to a mind diseased."

The watering-places, five in number, are Freiersbach, Petersthal, Griesbach, Antogast, and Rippoldsau. Petersthal was one of the few places where women went about in costumes; wonderful head-dresses, something like inflated Alsatian bows; angels with wings, but wings, from their position, more suggestive of horns—not usually worn by angels. Some of these costumes in distant parts of Europe (not that the Black Forest is distant, but where the railway has not penetrated, it is so for all practical purposes—unsophisticated and primitive)—some of these costumes, I say, in far-away places, are as heathenish as the tattooing and painting savages delight in: utterly beyond all common sense and beauty.

The road now gradually ascended ; we journeyed in all the glory of the midday sun. Higher and higher we went, more and more beautiful grew the view. We rose into a pure, light atmosphere which influenced the spirits like sparkling wine. The valley widened and expanded, the eye roamed with delight over vast stretches of wooded slopes.

So we reached Griesbach, where, said the coachman, he must needs halt a couple of hours for the sake of the cattle. The spot was of extreme beauty, and for hours he might well have substituted days. It was surprising to see here so large and imposing an hotel, and to be told by the landlord that in the season it was far too small to accommodate the crowds of invalids, *malades imaginaires*, &c., who flock to Griesbach for the waters. Nearly the end of the season, comparatively few people were remaining ; the others, like swallows in autumn, had taken flight. But the sensible swallows go to warmer climes ; many of the Griesbach visitors migrate towards the cardinal point, homewards.

Yet somewhat more than a mere handful of visitors still lingered. Table d'hôte was over, and opposite the hotel, in the open air, beside the running stream, ladies were drinking coffee, laughing and flirting with gentlemen, supremely idle and supremely happy. You saw directly at least one of the reasons why Griesbach is popular and frequented. A pavilion contained billiard-tables, and the balls were knocked about with a strength that suggested nothing of the invalid, or else that the waters had done good service. The ladies were dressed in the height of fashion—even here : and English, French, and German might be heard around.

Matches, said the landlord, were continually being formed in Griesbach ; and the assertion was not to be doubted. But the course of true love did not always run smoothly. Sometimes the parents objected on one side or the other, and the consequences, as the children say in their play, "were fatal." Tears, entreaties, rage, anger, domestic storms, packing up and flight, occasionally diversified the even tenour of the Griesbach social atmosphere. But in these days distance is comparative ; it yields more easily than the opposition of an inhuman parent ; and though flight may interrupt the course of love for a time, it is only gaining by a temporary lull fresh strength for victory.

The hotel looked comfortable and well-appointed. Light, airy rooms, all white paint and cheerful tones, were not without their influence upon the mind. The dining-room was large, long, and capable of seating a great crowd : I trembled at thought of the noise that must often echo within its four walls. Below, a large hall contained the wells, a square enclosure, like a small swimming-bath, where an attendant handed up at the end of a long pole a glass of the sparkling but noxious liquid, which seemed principally to combine the flavours of ink and bad eggs.

But Griesbach, apart from the waters, must be a pleasant resting

place. Yet the hotel, surrounded by hills (for though we had ascended from Petersthal, we never seemed to get nearer the tops of the mountains), suggested that in summer it must be oppressive. The landlord, however, said it was not so. In the hottest weather they had a breeze, whilst shade might always be found : cool avenues with overarching trees, under the hill side, where you might sit or lounge all day long, and listen to the rushing water, and read a favourite book, and inhale the scent of the pines. Again, they were so far above the sea level that the air was always light and sparkling. All who came to Griesbach departed the better for their visit : and people returned to it year after year—as we go back to our first loves, when, attracted to others by our fickle nature, we have found them wanting. Certainly, as far as could be seen, everything was done at the hotel to make a visit agreeable.

From the slopes behind the hotel magnificent views met the eye. The hills fall back in wooded ranges, varied by cultivated fields, where women worked in the blazing sun : picturesque dots in the landscape in their white caps, blue petticoats, and pink handkerchiefs crossed over the shoulders. Far up the opposite range, the merry ring of the woodman's axe—always a pleasant sound—might be heard, and the voice of the running stream never ceased. The broad, white winding road looked hot and sleepy in the sunshine. It is surprising how excellent these roads are, all through the Black Forest.

The woods were much thinner here than in many other parts. The landlord—my present oracle—said it was because the timber trade flourished in Griesbach. In some districts, the trees cut down had to be replaced with young ones ; so that the woods are ever green, ever growing. Here it was not so ; and the cleared places have been turned into fields and vineyards. "Ill blows the wind that profits nobody," says Shakespeare ; and these fields and vineyards give work to men and women who might otherwise find it hard to gain a livelihood.

Mine host seemed enterprising ; one of those energetic temperaments—not quite universal in these days—who do not let the grass grow under their feet. In winter, when Griesbach is deserted, the waters cease to allure, and the hotel is closed, he turns his thoughts to the timber trade. The busy bee gathers most honey ; and mine host of Griesbach no doubt finds that landlords, unlike cobblers, are not the better for sticking to their last. Two heads are better than one—why not two trades ? But whatever he may find, he was so kind and attentive, escorting me about the slopes, showing me all the small lions of the place, devoting his time when I could see that he had work on hand, and doing it all so readily, that I felt it would be a pleasure some day to become the guest of this kind host for a whole week.

In the valley a large saw-mill was at work—also belonging to

the landlord. An old-fashioned, picturesque water-wheel creaked and cracked, slowly turned by the stream, moving the machinery within that cut up the trees into planks. The flying sawdust scattered abroad the perfume of the pine. As almost always in the Black Forest, the men did their best to welcome an intruder, and show him anything there might be to examine. The somewhat rough machinery did its work well ; but it was the atmosphere of the place caused one to linger, and the pleasant swish of the saw as it penetrated the wood. These mills are great institutions in the Black Forest, and are worthy a visit ; the men greet you so civilly : and neither time nor distance obliterates the remembrance of the perfume.

It was almost my last impression of Griesbach. Soon after, we were once more on the road. And now occasionally we seemed to get more on a level with the tops of the mountains, looked down upon vast pine forests, a deep smiling valley with its onrushing stream ; occasional villages—like angels' visits to the earth ; more saw-mills. Roadside houses like milestones marked the way ; evidences, amidst all this extent of hill and valley and forestland, that even here the short and simple annals of many a human life were being played out.

Amidst a repetition of such scenes—for in the Black Forest you must expect something of sameness, though without monotony—we journeyed through the afternoon. The horses, after their long mid-day rest, travelled bravely. Towards evening we reached Rippoldsau, and the end of our second day's journey.

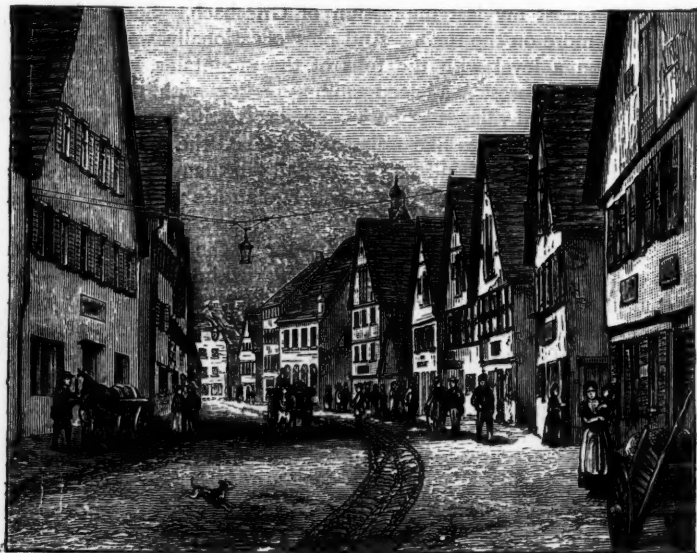
If the extent of the hotel at Griesbach was surprising, still more so was that at Rippoldsau. It appeared endless. And here the season still seemed in full flow. The place was thronged with visitors, full of bustle and excitement. People were running to and fro. Everyone was doing something with a will, if only idly lounging and smoking in a chair. The long dining-room at night was crowded with people at supper ; many others were taking it *à la fresco*. When I first arrived, little groups and parties were seated in the open space before the hotel at small round tables. Ladies were chatting and working ; gentlemen chatting and smoking ; children "disporting" themselves, and making everyone thoroughly uncomfortable and misanthropic, except the fond and foolish parents.

Having heard much of the restoring properties of the baths, it seemed the right thing to test their virtues after a long day's journey. A man-servant acted as pilot through endless passages. At length, when I began to wonder whether these subterranean mazes would lead to an intermediate world, I was duly consigned (like a bale of goods) to the tender mercies of a bath-woman. Seizing a long bit of wood, she turned on the water, and began splashing about, the verisimilitude of another *Fury* ; and like a witch in *Macbeth*, stirred up the cauldron with her stick. "Fair is foul, and foul is fair," I expected to hear her mutter in haggard tones, and

looked if some grimalkin with fiery eyes and arched back kept guard upon her shoulder.

But no. She seemed a peaceful woman enough ; it was only her way. Just as these better thoughts in her favour were arising, a shrill cry without announced, with as much noise as those terrible trumpeters in "Lohengrin" heralding the break of day, that "THE COUNTESS WAS COMING !"

Immediately all was excitement and confusion. The bath-woman turned pale, dropped her witch's stick, deserted her post, rushed out to greet THE COUNTESS. I followed, and beheld a German giantess



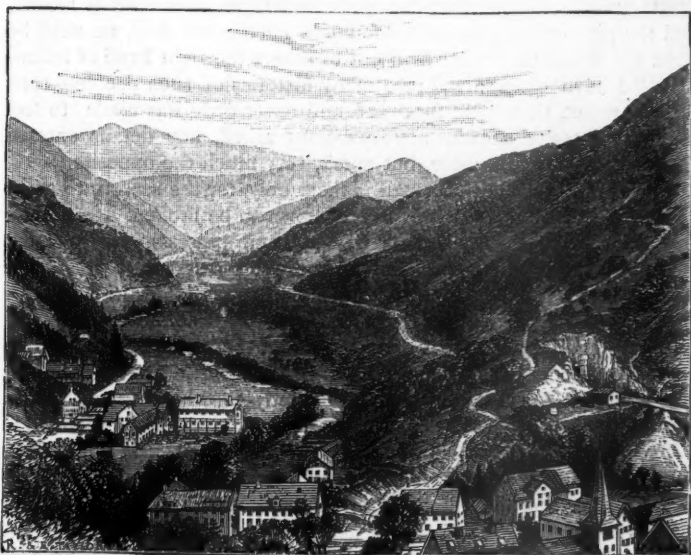
HORNBERG.

in full sail, accompanied by a maid carrying a huge bag. As a truthful historian, I am bound to record that she was ugly ; no other word will describe this lady's charms ; possibly she was amiable. The bath-woman backed and bobbled before the Countess just as one does before royalty ; and the giantess swept into her bath-room as if the world had been made for her, and for her alone. It was some time before order reigned once more, and anything beneath a Countess received attention.

Rippoldsau is evidently more lively and frequented than Griesbach, there is a little more going on, and it seems more popular. It is 2,000 feet above the level of the sea, and rejoices in a pure, bright air. The somewhat narrow valley is surrounded by densely wooded heights, yet after the lonely roads and forest solitudes that you have

traversed and loved for days, to come suddenly upon this lively settlement and crowd of visitors is at the first moment oppressive with a sense of suffocation and restraint.

The previous rest, repose, and seclusion have vanished for a time. All this might be the life and activity of a fashionable watering-place; it seems out of character with the Black Forest, and is resented accordingly. In the open space enclosing the three sides of the great white building, people are sitting at small tables, taking their favourite beverage, in full enjoyment of "*le grand air*." Visitors form themselves into groups and coteries; social merriment reigns. Music



GUTACHTHAL.

is in force at night, and sometimes dancing. Sentimental couples pace the avenues, and under cover of the darkness make love and eternal vows. If there is a moon they gaze at it in concert.

"In full orb'd glory, yonder moon divine
Rolls through the dark-blue depths."

So wrote Southey; and this and much more, concealed to ordinary eyes, lovers apparently discover in the attractions of the Queen of Night. Their paradise is very sweet while it lasts; and awakening to realities is, after all, good discipline.

The most imposing personage (after the Countess) was the policeman; so grand in gold braid, so gentlemanly in appearance, it was puzzling to mark his rank. As night advanced, I found myself walking his beat, and joined him in the shady avenue, under the stars.

He gave me all his history, private and public, domestic and official. It is so pleasant to get at the lives of those you thus casually meet ; to learn their joys and sorrows ; for a moment hold out to them the hand of sympathy or encouragement. None can tell what good it may do ; how a few words in the right place may chance to turn upwards the scale in a life that was going down. Sympathy is so hard to find ; at best it is administered with so little delicacy ; and it is just those that need it who can ill stand the rough handling of the world. If the exercise of the fellow-feeling that makes us wondrous kind does nothing more, at least it keeps our sympathies alive, our hearts green. And in that day when for us the silver cord is loosed, and the pitcher has gone to the fountain for the last time, we shall be none the worse for having held out to others the right hand of fellowship. I have often dived into many histories of such people—seen for a moment, then gone for ever—and never once was made to feel that any interest shown, any questions asked, any details entered into were thought intrusive, but much, very much the opposite.

At Rippoldsau the policeman is there only for the season, to assist in keeping the peace that was never known to be broken. He patrols up and down, knows all, chats with all, and passes a very pleasant time. This especial guardian of the place was too refined and gentle for his office. It was impossible to realize him in the act of marching off a refractory character to solitary confinement. His time was nearly up, for the season was on the wane, and he said he should not be sorry to go. He was getting a little tired of the life ; was wearying—as the Scotch say so quaintly—for his wife and bairns. Quite a glow came into his voice as he spoke of them : there were his treasures, there was his heart. There are some things right in the world after all : it is not utterly crooked, has not all to be made straight.

Of course there was a band at Rippoldsau. There is a band for the season in all these places : a terrible, an impossible band. This was, without exception, the most terrible and impossible band ever heard : the most melancholy. The performers all looked as miserable as their music sounded. When they began their evening duty, just beneath my windows, without warning—so silently had they taken their seats—I thought the place had suddenly gone mad. Soon I felt that I was going mad myself. Indescribable wails filled the air. For a whole hour these unearthly sounds went on ; but long before that hour expired, I had fled to the mountains in sheer self-defence.

Here, too, the woodman's axe was doing its work. The lower slopes, immediately above the valley, were bare of everything but a few fruit trees. Small apples, whose branches grew on a level with the hillside path ; tempting by reason of their looks, and because it needed only to raise the hand and pluck them. Small, picturesque houses dotted the slopes and the valley, and I wondered how the inmates fared in winter ; for, on taking a short cut downwards, I found myself, at every step, sinking, like Christian, into a Slough of Despond.

At an unearthly hour next morning, the melancholy musicians again went through their performances as though every air played was one more nail in their coffin. If they resembled the lark in no other sense, at least they imitated him in the matter of early rising. "And soaring every singest," could not be said of them as of Shelley's lark; rather they took themselves and their hearers into unimagined depths—of misery and anguish. Suddenly a window at right angles with mine was opened, and a bass voice in distressed quavers shouted out above the wailing of the catgut, in unmistakable English: "Man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long." I hastened for a sight of the philosopher, but the oracle having spoken, had withdrawn, and the casement was closed again. The players evidently took it for a compliment—though an empty one, since it did not rain gold—for they raised between them the ghost of a smile, and wailed on more determinedly than ever.

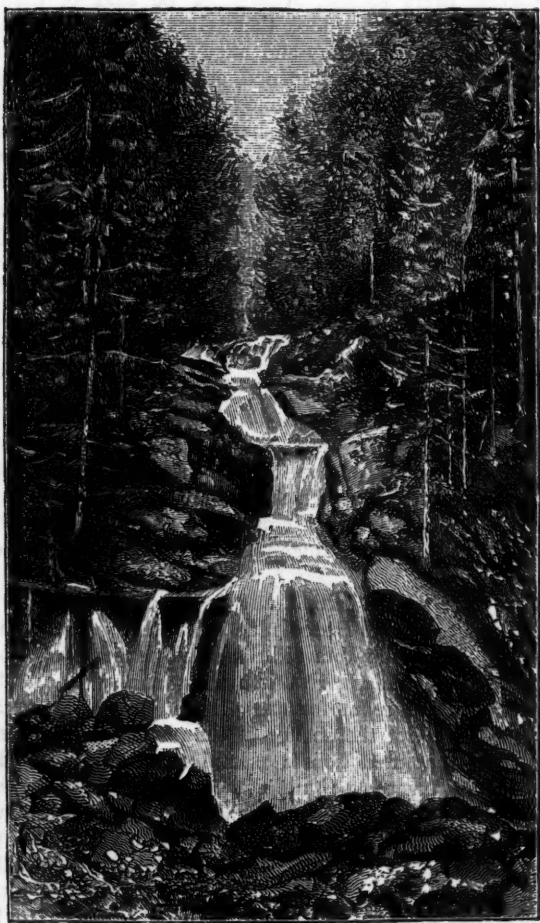
Early that morning we left Rippoldsau, and fine weather still smiled upon us. If there were clouds, it was merely those white fleecy visitants that add so much to the beauty of earth and sky, bringing out the deep blue of the one, throwing strong lights and shades upon the other. We wound about hill after hill of densely wooded pines; or, descending to the level of the vale, ran side by side with the flowing stream; wooded slopes above us, before us, behind us, around us; the trees waving and murmuring as the breeze took them, making, with the ripple of the water, a harmony of sounds that seems to form a connecting link in nature—the winds and waves, the forests and laughing valleys—binding them eternally to each other.

Klösterle was soon left behind, and its church with twin towers, built on the ruins of an old Benedictine monastery; a small, scattered village, where people stay to avoid the greater expense of Rippoldsau, or when its more formidable rival is overflowing. Presently the valley opened out to make room for the picturesque village of Seebach, reposing snugly under the shelter of the pine hills; a quaint lovely spot, its gabled pointed houses primitive and old-world like, the valley rich in fruit trees and smiling fields.

Next came Shapbach, a straggling village where, for the most part, the ground floor of the houses is converted into stables and given up to the cows and horses, the inhabitants modestly retiring to the upper portion of their dwellings; then Wolfach, the latter a small picturesque town celebrated for its pine-cone baths, a remedy said to be luxuriously delicious. *Toujours perdrix* is not desirable; and so, in spite of the beauties of nature, it was pleasant to pass through these villages and towns, note their quaint houses, and watch the people at their daily work: these hewers of wood and drawers of water. The timber trade is carried on extensively in this district also; saw-mills have their place—and trees their time for falling.

About midday Hornberg was reached, an old town of a certain

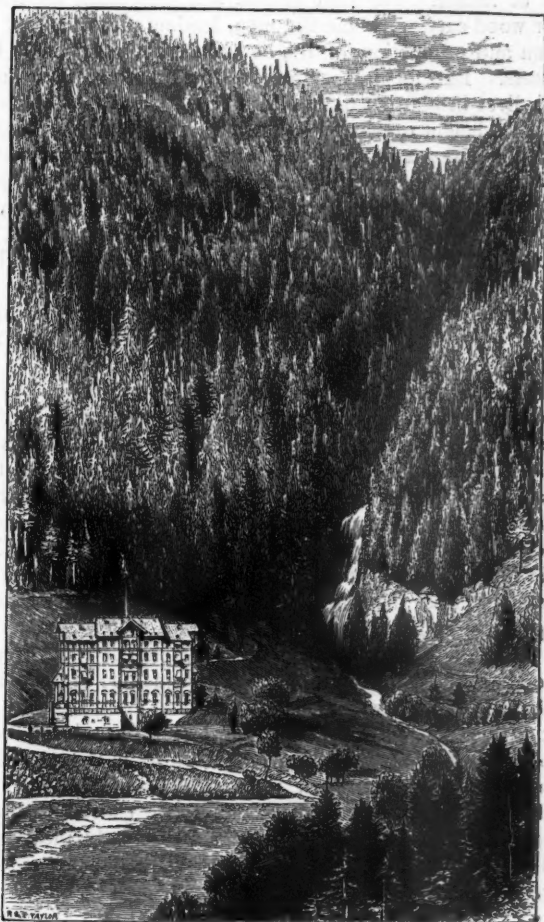
size and importance, in situation still more favoured than either Rippoldsau or Griesbach ; far more open ; reposing in a great amphitheatre of hills, at the foot of the principal Black Forest chain. Here we stayed some hours, and amongst other interesting visits the



WATERFALL, TRIBERG.

landlord of the inn escorted me over his workshop, and showed me all the mysteries of the Black Forest carving. Men and boys were turning, chiselling, and cutting out with delicate tools and wonderful dexterity. It was curious to watch a small block of wood rapidly assume proportions under skilful hands : a shapeless piece take the form

of an angel's wing, another the head of an eagle with outstretched pinions. The men, not all equally clever, seemed all equally happy and contented with their lot. If the master pointed out one more than usually gifted, he was certain to be unlike the others in a greater



SCHWARZWALD HOTEL, TRIBERG.

refinement and delicacy of look ; showing that Nature bestows not with unsparing hand ; but, holding the scales of justice, administers therefrom her gifts.

Hornberg is very much like an overgrown village. Its principal street quaint with gabled houses, old-fashioned windows, and long

rows of shutters that stare at you like sentinels. But it is thriving and industrious. There are factories given up to glass work and the making of common pottery or china; tall chimneys now and then send forth clouds of black smoke, a discordant element amidst these beauties of nature. Far more artistic and interesting are the workshops for wood-carving, where the men, leading pleasant lives in the cultivation and production of the beautiful, should rejoice in the gift they possess. But for it, they might, like many of their brethren, pass their lives in blasting rocks and breaking stones for the roads.

A wooded height overlooking the town is crowned by the ruins of an old castle, where a princess of Wurtemberg is said to have languished out her life in exile. From one point four valleys open out, the Gutachthal, with magnificent hills stretching upwards, in broad, expansive outlines, a silvery stream running its course, whilst the far end of the valley is bounded by another chain, dim and hazy in outline, cleaving the sky. Towards Triberg you may trace a long line of steam, and almost fancy you hear the on rushing of the train, as, far above the level of the road, it twists and turns like a snake amongst the pine hills.

This same train reminded me that time was passing. Lovely as was the view, it was impossible to gaze upon it for ever, like the poor exiled princess. Charming landscapes take us out of ourselves and the world as soon as anything; but in the "eternal fitness of things" there is a time for abstaining even from contemplating the beauties of nature. Down the rugged way, and coming right into the backyards of old houses, whence assuredly all romance had fled, I found myself in the quaint old street. It was quiet enough. A few people were strolling, rather than hurrying, about their business; others were lounging at their doors, talking to opposite neighbours, recording, it may be, the small chronicles and excitements of their lives. But the general air and impression of the place was one of repose—as it should be in these far-away mountain nooks.

Back to the inn, where the landlord had prepared the best cup of coffee I found in all the Black Forest—a small record with which he ought to be credited. Then Jehu came round with the carriage, and with a melancholy smile remarked, as we started, that our last stage had commenced. It had been a particularly pleasant drive. Excepting the contretemps at the outset, all had gone merrily as a marriage bell. The coachman, perhaps as a sort of "amende honorable," a repentance bearing fruit—alas! not always the case with us—had outdone himself in civility and obliging efforts. Sunshine and blue skies had brightened our path. This is absolutely indispensable to the enjoyment of the Black Forest; no place can be worse in wet, gloomy, cloudy weather. A melancholy falls upon nature the most cheerful temperament must yield to; mists arise and fogs surround you; all the views, near or distant, the woods, outlines and undulations, are obliterated. A wind creeps down the

valleys and searches you out; and probably the next halting place will yield no fire to restore animation.

The way from Hornberg to Triberg was perhaps the most picturesque bit of the whole drive. The Black Forest railway here twists and turns about the hills; now close to our left hand, far above the level, and now, in a few moments, as by magic, on the opposite heights. Small farms or settlements; here and there a small church; fruit trees in abundance. A few country people in quaint costumes passed us on the road, and—a pleasant and general custom in the Forest—took off their hats and wished one good day in a voice that seemed to say they were at peace with all mankind.

So we reached Triberg; and winding round by the railway station, up between the hills, entered the long steep street of the thriving little town. Jehu was now on his own territories, his dignity at stake; he cracked his whip and dashed upwards in a way that brought all sorts of heads to all sorts of windows. The hotel was at the further end of the town. A turn to the left, a sharp, short ascent, and our journey was over.

The Schwarzwald Hotel was romantically placed. Apart from the town, it stood alone on the hill side. Fir woods stretched upwards behind it; a waterfall ran its course within a few minutes' walk, almost the prettiest fall in the Black Forest. It forced its way between pine-fringed rocks, ferns and bracken beautified the wild, rugged sides. Dashing noisily over great boulders, emptying its various cascades into seething pools, it finally escaped and rushed through the principal streets of the town in two swiftly flowing channels; so wide that boards or planks were placed over them before the doors, to enable one to cross the road.

Triberg is a rallying point for visitors from all parts of the Black Forest. People make for it from Baden on the one side, from Switzerland on the other. Thus it is quite fashionable and crowded. Amongst other good turns, the coachman had telegraphed for a room, and they had reserved one with a balcony and a charming outlook over the town and the waterfall, the valley and surrounding hills. But the hotel was so crowded that before ten o'clock at night, everyone was turned out of the reading-room, beds were extemporized on sofas and chairs—and one pitied those who had to occupy them. One unfortunate traveller was drafted on to a balcony, where he must have kept company with the spirits of the mist, so blue and shivering did he look the next morning.

If adversity makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows, so travelling sometimes extends our experience to the eccentricities of time and place.

MRS. MONTAGU'S GOVERNESS.

I.

HARRY sat on the hearthrug tormenting an unlucky kitten ; Dollie, Teddy, and Tim, in the window-recess, were enacting the story of Daniel in the lions' den, but departing from the text of the Scripture narrative, inasmuch as the lions, Teddy and Tim, were commencing to gnaw Daniel, each having introduced a fat little arm into his mouth ; against which innovation their victim was protesting with all the power of his lungs, not altogether, it is to be feared, upon the ground of principle. Guy stood beside the table, learning a spelling lesson at the top of his voice, while Ethel, under cover of the table-cloth, was creeping along with a big pin, which would presently make acquaintance with the calves of Guy's legs. Their distracted mother, Mrs. Montagu, sat in their midst, the baby on her lap rattling a big bunch of keys.

At last the pin reached its destination, and the youthful operator was fully rewarded for any slight expenditure of trouble, for Master Guy jumped at least a foot high, and shrieked enough to bring the house down. The noise so startled Harry that he dropped the cat, which made off for the door, after bestowing a deep scratch upon the young hero's hand by way of a parting attention ; he wept long and sore, and the poor frightened baby, letting fall the keys, wailed in harmony—or out of it ; while poor Mrs. Montagu would have liked to shed tears also.

In time all the noisy little mischief-makers were despatched to bed, but was it surprising that their unhappy mother was worn out, pale, and tearful at the end of the day ?

"I suppose those young rebels have been half killing you?" began her husband, as soon as the dinner was over and the pair were left alone. "I have no doubt that Ethel has been feeding the baby with ashes, Guy and Harry having a stand-up fight, and all the rest making noise enough for Bedlam."

This picture was so far below the reality that Mrs. Montagu discreetly forbore to make any reply.

"Well ! something must be done. I've spoken of it before, and now the thing *shall* be done," resumed the oracle. "We'll have a governess for them."

And rising from his seat, Mr. Montagu reached paper, pen, and ink, and forthwith drew up an advertisement, which he read aloud.

"Wanted, a Governess. Learning and accomplishments of no consequence : strength of arm the only indispensable qualification. Apply, &c."

"Robert, state the facts; sweet and talented children, but their education rather neglected."

"Humph!" ejaculated the husband, in a tone that savoured of scepticism.

It was according to the notions of neither parent precisely that the notice was eventually drawn up; but one was at last written out and despatched by that very night's post, and in due course it appeared in the columns of the *Times* newspaper.

To that advertisement in the course of the next few days exactly eighty-four replies were received, and what the ultimate decision would have been it would be hard to say, but for the intervention of a chance circumstance.

One afternoon as Mrs. Montagu sat in the dining-room, for the twentieth time turning over the various letters of application, a servant entered, carrying upon his tray a lady's visiting-card, bearing the words, "Miss Marion Lockhart."

It was the name of one of the applicants for the situation of governess. "Good gracious! Will the whole eighty-four call?" exclaimed Mrs. Montagu, and in her dismay would have gone straight off into a fainting-fit, but that there was no person at hand to recover her; so postponing the troublesome ceremony, she hastened to the drawing-room to her visitor. "Pray sit down," she said, indicating a chair near the fire, while she herself sank upon a couch opposite.

"Thank you; I have ventured to call because I cannot afford delay in finding a fresh situation," replied the stranger, timidly. "I hope it does not inconvenience you to see me."

"Not in the least. I am glad you have called," replied the elder lady, who was pleased with her new acquaintance. The girl's pleasant, well-modulated voice and graceful manner were attractive; her dress was simple and neat, and her face, Mrs. Montagu came to the conclusion, was without exception the most beautiful she had ever seen. In repose it was sad, as though its owner, young as she was, had known sorrow and suffering in no common measure.

Miss Lockhart at once proceeded to state her qualifications. These were perfectly satisfactory, and just as the young lady was concluding her story, Mrs. Montagu heard a welcome sound in the hall. It was her husband's step, and his return from town at the moment was most opportune. Excusing herself briefly to her visitor, Mrs. Montagu flew to consult with her husband.

After hearing her account of the candidate, Robert Montagu followed his wife into the drawing-room. Miss Lockhart could not fail to be aware that his entrance was for the purpose of inspection, but the knowledge did not seem to disconcert her in the least. On the contrary, she conversed with them easily and naturally for a few minutes, and then rose to take leave.

"You will write, then, Mrs. Montagu, to Lady Ringwood? I

suppose you will be satisfied with her recommendation alone?" added Miss Lockhart, hesitatingly, and it was the first sign of nervousness that she had betrayed. "I have lived with her for four years."

"Certainly; it will be quite sufficient," said Mrs. Montagu. And there the interview would have ended, but Mr. Montagu had suddenly a fresh suggestion to make.

"My dear," said he, turning to his wife, "you are going into town this week; could you not go to-morrow and call in Portland Place?"

"It may not be convenient to Lady Ringwood to see me," said Mrs. Montagu, colouring a little with bashfulness. "She is leaving for Mentone in a few days, for the benefit of her husband's health."

"Pray call!" cried Miss Lockhart, eagerly. "If it is not putting you to too much trouble, I should like you to speak to Lady Ringwood; and she, I am sure, would prefer it to writing," concluded the young lady with confidence; and she spoke the truth.

The distance from Freshfield to London was but a matter of twenty miles or thereabouts, and it was still early when Mrs. Montagu found her way next day to Portland Place, where she met with a kind reception. Lady Ringwood and Laura Montagu moved in very different spheres of society, but both were essentially good women, and they understood one another instinctively.

Of Miss Lockhart, Lady Ringwood spoke with the most cordial commendation. "I can only say, Mrs. Montagu, that I myself regard Miss Lockhart with feelings of affection and esteem. Her management of children is wonderful. Mine adore her, yet she is in many respects very strict with them. I feel parting with her deeply and have offered to make arrangements to keep her; but she prefers to be independent, perhaps justly. The truth is that I can hardly discuss Miss Lockhart under the form of employer and employed; she has been more of a friend to me."

Naturally, as the upshot of the interview, Miss Lockhart was engaged by Mrs. Montagu, it being further arranged that she should go down to Freshfield upon the following Monday to enter upon her new duties.

Mrs. Montagu found Miss Lockhart all that Lady Ringwood had declared her, and more. She kept all those unruly little people in check, yet made them happy; and very shortly her clever help and sweet temper had rendered her indispensable to Mrs. Montagu, who could no longer have imagined existence without her invaluable governess's aid and support.

II.

TIME went on, bringing no changes into that quiet house at Freshfield. At length, after a couple of years of this peaceful monotony, a small event was in prospect which promised to vary the

order of things. This was the return home, after ten years' absence in India, of Mr. Talbot North, Mrs. Montagu's only brother; and that little lady, grown, since her introductory struggle, younger and plumper, thanks to Miss Lockhart's care, was in a happy flutter of expectation.

It was Sunday night, a fair moonlit Sabbath evening, and Mr. and Mrs. Montagu had gone to church, leaving Miss Lockhart at home imparting a little theological instruction to their numerous offspring. As Miss Lockhart was thus engaged, her attention was caught by the sound of a footstep on the gravel walk without; the next moment the hall bell was sharply pulled. It was followed by a brief dialogue between some new-comer and the only maid-servant at home; which terminated simultaneously with the appearance of the stranger in the drawing-room. This unexpected and unknown visitor was a tall handsome man of about thirty or thirty-five years of age; and, as he stood within the doorway surveying the wondering group about the table, he smiled in an amused fashion.

At once it rushed across Miss Lockhart's mind who was the unseasonable intruder: and meanwhile the new-comer had not all the gazing to himself, for the children's six pairs of eyes were riveted upon him in unmitigated astonishment.

Finally the gentleman spoke. "Do you not know me?" asked he, laughing delightedly.

"I think you must be Mr. North," answered Miss Lockhart, half rising from her seat.

"And you, I am sure, are Miss Lockhart," said Mr. North, for it was no other than Mrs. Montagu's brother who had returned at this inopportune moment. "By name, at least, you are exceedingly well-known to me," continued the young man, as he came forward with frankly outstretched hand.

"You Uncle Talbot!" exclaimed Guy, in tones of manifest disapproval and disappointment, for their Indian uncle had been a species of hero to them. "Come back like that! Why, you might be anybody!"

Miss Lockhart, looking at the young man standing before her in his splendid strength, with his engaging debonnaire expression of countenance, could not endorse Master Guy's discerning judgment.

"Have you dined, Mr. North?" inquired she, as it occurred to her that she ought to play hostess in Mrs. Montagu's absence. "What will you take?"

"Nothing at present, thank you, except a cup of tea, if I can have one."

So Miss Lockhart, mindful of her responsibilities, made the tea and brought him a cup with her own hands, North watching the process, and admiring her dainty grace while she was at work. She was dressed to-night only in a plain dark woollen gown, but it fell about her slender form in soft, undulating folds as she moved across

the room, while about her neck was drawn a white handkerchief of filmy lace, the quaint style of which set off her peculiar beauty. Talbot North found himself noting all these details with extreme interest. Every pulse of Talbot North's being would long beat to the slight incidents of that evening; every word spoken was graven upon his heart in letters of enduring stone.

Mr. North had just finished drinking his tea when a slight commotion in the hall announced the return of the church-goers. Miss Lockhart rose in haste. "I had better go and tell Mrs. Montagu," she said, and left the room.

In a moment Mrs. Montagu had reached the drawing-room, and her plump little form was clasped in her brother's arms.

"Oh, Talbot! you promised to write or telegraph. Imagine our being gone to church and everything! What have you had?"

"Miss Lockhart very kindly gave me a cup of tea," answered North.

"A cup of tea!" exclaimed Mrs. Montagu with a shriek of horror. "A cup of tea after coming from Bombay! Good gracious! we must have supper at once. And for me to be out when you arrived! I could cry. Where are your belongings? Shall we send to the station for them?"

"I have nothing but a hand-bag. An accident detained me in Paris, and they left by a previous train. I suppose they will turn up all in good time."

III.

IT was only a very few days later that Mr. Montagu, talking alone with his wife, suddenly started a novel idea in an inquiry he made; and although the question was put in joking form, it was none the less suggestive.

"My dear, are you prepared to lose your invaluable governess, and to receive her in the new relation of sister-in-law?"

"What do you mean, Robert?"

"Does nothing strike you with regard to Talbot and Miss Lockhart?"

"Talbot likes Miss Lockhart, and respects her, as we all do, but there is nothing more between them that I see."

"Talbot likes Miss Lockhart very particularly, and *not* as we all do," retorted Mr. Montagu, laughing. "Her sentiments are, to my mind, the only doubtful point in the affair," added the speaker, thoughtfully.

"A royal princess would be proud to marry Talbot," said that gentleman's sister fondly, and the belief was not so very remarkable, for Talbot North, with his charm of manner and his sunny temper, was a universal favourite. "But Talbot might have looked higher than a girl in Marion Lockhart's position," concluded Mrs. Montagu, a little regretfully.

"She will make him an excellent wife," said Mr. Montagu, with commendable common sense and right feeling.

"No one says otherwise," returned his partner, in gentle reproach. "The marvel to me is that Talbot has not married before."

The very contingency that had seemed so impossible in his sister's judgment came to pass. Mr. North made a formal proposal of marriage to Miss Lockhart, and was rejected. Her refusal was firm and decided; but, on the other hand, it was given with evident emotion; seeing which, North took heart of grace, and, in concluding the interview, spoke hopefully of a different result in the future.

"I shall plead my cause again, Miss Lockhart; I deserve my present failure, because in my eagerness I have spoken too soon."

"I wish I could persuade you that my answer is quite final," replied Miss Lockhart, with a distress of manner that was in strong opposition to the tranquil confidence of his tones and mien. "You must indeed go away and forget me."

"Forget you!" he returned, in a voice tremulous with earnestness. "My darling, I shall never forget you while the world stands."

Moving her head from side to side as though seeking some visible refuge in which to hide her distress, she stood in silence for a few minutes while her companion awaited her next words with an impatient anxiety.

"If you only knew it, I am unworthy of your least regard: of a moment's interest!" she said at length, with a cry of anguish. "Put me out of your thoughts, give me no place in your heart," she resumed, after a space of silence. "I do not want you to hate me, but you must forget me. And let this interview be our last meeting," she added, in a broken voice. Then giving one quick, deprecatory glance into his face, which pain and trouble were beginning to darken, Marion stole from the room.

IV.

AVOIDING the drawing-room, with its cheerful atmosphere of talk and music, Mr. North chose to pass the evening of that momentous day alone in the library, an apartment little affected by any member of that unstudious household. Long he sat there immersed in thought, reviewing the events of the afternoon. A sanguine man by nature, and desperately anxious for success in this matter, he was very loth to give up the hope of winning Marion Lockhart for his wife; yet the conviction would force itself upon his mind that her refusal was, as she had declared, final.

An interruption came at length in the shape of a light tap at the door, startling North in the midst of his gloomy reflections.

"Come in," he called out impatiently.

Thereupon the handle of the door was softly turned; the door itself was next pushed wide, and carefully again closed and latched; and

then North raised his eyes to see who the intruder upon his sad solitude might be. Immediately a great change came over his countenance, and a smile sprang to his lips.

His visitor was his own fair beloved, looking lovelier even than her wont as she advanced with a slight flush of crimson upon each cheek, and her slender fingers interlacing themselves in palpable embarrassment. Observing her expression and hesitation, Mr. North came to a happy conclusion in his own mind, and going forward took her tenderly by the hand. She made no resistance; but, whatever the saying she had come to deliver, it did not seem easy of utterance, for although her lips parted once or twice, no sound came from them.

"You mistook your own feelings this morning," cried North at length in the face of her silence, his voice subdued, joy thrilling in every tone. "You have come to tell me that you are going to bless me with some morsel of hope."

"I should hardly come to tell you that," answered Marion, giving a faint smile under the sense of amusement that some trifle will often furnish in the midst of deep suffering.

"I beg your pardon; I thought that perhaps of your goodness you wished to bestow a crumb of comfort upon me before I went away," said North, with the meekness of great love.

"No, it is nothing of that nature," Miss Lockhart made reply, sinking into the chair that North placed for her. "But I have come to inform you of a fact, because to do so is the only atonement I can make you. And I pray," added she, momentarily lifting her sad eyes to heaven, "I pray that the confession may undo the consequences of my sin. I have nothing else left to hope and pray for."

"What have you to tell me?" demanded North, hoarsely.

But the blow had virtually fallen. North already knew from her countenance and her words, by some sure instinct he felt that Marion Lockhart's mission, be it what it might, was of a nature to separate them wide as the east is from the west.

"I am married; that is what I came to say," said Marion; and as soon as she had spoken, she hid her face in her handkerchief without waiting to see the effect of the communication upon her lover.

"What!" shouted he. "What do you tell me?"

"I am already married," repeated Marion in a broken voice of infinite weariness and sadness.

Talbot North grasped her by the shoulder; he almost shook her in his bewilderment.

"Do you know what you are saying? You tell me that you are married?"

"It is the simple truth; I was married some years ago."

"Good heavens! all is indeed over," groaned North.

After that there was a pause. The young man was wrestling with the anguish of his wound in absolute stillness; while Marion only stirred at intervals to wipe the tears that were coursing down her cheeks.

The suspense was becoming intolerable to Marion, and at last she rose to end the interview. But her movement aroused North, who had hitherto remained, his head supported on his arm, motionless against the mantelpiece. She had looked for some harsh speech, words of contempt, hatred; but the face that he now turned towards her was a severer punishment than any reproach his lips could have uttered. She gazed at him in stricken amazement; it seemed as though years of suffering must have passed over his head to have altered his features so greatly.

"Why did I never know this before?" asked he huskily. "Why have you kept it secret?"

"Mine is a very unhappy story," answered Marion with quivering lips. "When I was very young I made a most unfortunate marriage; my husband proved utterly unkind, unworthy; and after a very few months I left him. Wishing to put it out of his power to trace me, I took my second name, that of Lockhart. I have never seen or heard of him since."

"Is my sister aware of these circumstances?"

"She knows nothing," answered Marion, a streak of crimson flashing across the pallor of her cheek. "Sometimes, while Mrs. Montagu has treated me with such confidence and kindness, I have felt myself a kind of impostor. But oftener I forget—perhaps you can hardly believe it—but I *forget* that I have any other name than that of Lockhart. I have been very happy here," she added with a sigh.

"Poor child!" breathed Mr. North, softly.

"Shall you inform Mrs. Montagu of this? Will it be right to do so?" asked Marion a little anxiously, after a pause of silence and of painful reflection on the part of both.

"What sort of a man do you take me to be? No, your secret is safe, so far as I am concerned."

"Have I done very wrong?" inquired Marion again after a brief hesitation.

"We are not able to be judges one of another," answered North, a certain gentleness tempering the gravity of his manner and words.

"But you have done harm. Do you not see, child, that your putting yourself in a false position works evil by putting men like myself in a false position also?"

"Will you forgive me?" she asked, timidly. "And will you not forget me?"

"I forgive you; forget you I never can. It must be my lot to love you while life lasts."

"Oh, hush! I am too greatly punished. But it is not true; happiness may yet be in store for you —"

"Stay!" cried North, interrupting her sternly; "say nothing of that kind. I never breathed the word love to any woman before, and I never shall again. I loved you and must continue now to love you to the end."

V.

"WELL! good-bye, and good luck to you! mind you get the appointment," said Mr. Montagu to Talbot the following morning, prior to the departure of the latter for London, whither he was going on business.

"Thanks; but I have changed my mind as to settling in England; I intend to return to India."

As he made the announcement North saw Miss Lockhart start violently, then her eyes met his in one burning gaze in which their very souls met, and the truth was confessed. From that moment North knew that her life was no less wrecked than his own, that the parting was no less grievous to her than to him; and he could not have told whether the knowledge were more bitter or more sweet.

"Nonsense, we shan't let you go abroad again," said his brother-in-law lightly, for he did not attach much consequence to North's remark, treating it as a mere momentary expression of perversity. Only Marion Lockhart understood the serious purpose underlying his words.

"Of course not," said Mrs. Montagu, in echo of her husband. "Well, we shall see you back this day week; you are going no further than London, I suppose?"

"And into Kent," replied North in a somewhat absent tone of voice.

"Kent! what takes you there?" inquired Mrs. Montagu in surprise.

"It is only upon some business of other people's," replied North in a tone that did not invite further questioning. And a few minutes later a servant announced that the dogcart was at the door, and the young man was borne swiftly away.

It was characteristic of Talbot North that he attended in the first place to the business which he had declared to be that of other people. Upon his arrival in London he delayed only to take a hasty luncheon at his hotel and to write one or two letters, and then, driving to Charing Cross, he took rail once more.

As the train drew near to the small village of Rushford, his destination, North pulled a small flat parcel out of the breast-pocket of his coat. Examining the seals to make sure that they were intact, he carefully read the address legibly written on one side of the parcel; and then, replacing it in its former receptacle, fell to considering how he could best discharge the mission with which he was fraught. This was the conveying to a wife the intelligence of the death of her husband. The event had taken place in a foreign land some twelve months before, and North had gathered that a coldness and separation had existed between the wedded pair; but the dews of death were already gathering fast over the sick man's brow when he,

Mr. North, the only European within reach, had been called to the bedside, and, to ease the mind of the dying stranger, had undertaken the charge of seeking out his wife and imparting the intelligence of her loss. At length North was about to discharge the melancholy trust, and for all he knew the news might call forth the bitterest regret and anguish.

Mr. North went straight to the Post Office, as the most likely place in which to discover the address of Mrs. Milman. It was at the same time an emporium for the sale of drapery, and the whole force of the mercantile establishment, as well as the entire body of Her Majesty's officials, drew near to listen to Mr. North's inquiries. No such person as Mrs. Milman was known.

"She was a Miss Wilson," explained North, by way of assisting the memories of these Rushford people.

"Oh! Miss Wilson! She left here years ago; went away when her mother died."

"Do you know of anyone who was intimate with her, who could give me her present address?"

A great shaking of heads attested the general ignorance.

"This is strange," muttered North; "very strange." But the matter had altogether very little interest for him; so, giving up the quest, he took the next train back to town, where he put into the hands of a private inquiry office the business of discovering the lady who had so mysteriously disappeared.

The task was a very small one for those accomplished gentlemen. Upon the morning of the fourth day, as North sat at breakfast in the coffee-room of his hotel, a note was given him containing all necessary particulars. The missing person had been traced, her past employment and history learnt; and her present address was furnished for Mr. North's further purposes in accordance with his request.

The effect of this letter upon North was remarkable: he sprang up from his chair; first, the colour rushed into his face, then as suddenly retreated, leaving his countenance pale and set; and the letter almost dropped from his nerveless fingers, while his eyes fixed themselves upon vacancy. It was fortunate that he happened to be alone in the room.

At last, calling for his bill, North made some pretext of completing his breakfast; but his appetite was gone with his tranquillity, and five minutes later he rose and quitted the hotel.

At three o'clock upon that same afternoon he was walking up the avenue to his sister's house at Freshfield, trying to resolve a difficulty which had just presented itself to his mind—that of accounting to his family for his sudden appearance again in their circle. This was a gordian knot which he utterly failed to undo, but which was cut for him in one moment by the servant who opened the door.

"Master and mistress have gone from home, sir; they will not be

back till some time to-morrow," said that functionary, in some distress over his ill-timed arrival, and quite expecting Mr. North to be overwhelmed with vexation.

On the contrary, Mr. North received the tidings with cheerful resignation, and at once inquired for Miss Lockhart.

"I have sent for you because I have something of importance to communicate," said North to her, as soon as Marion had joined him in the drawing-room.

"Something of importance to communicate!" echoed Marion, with the vague alarm that often seized her. "Will you tell me quickly?"

"Sit down," said North, gently, taking her trembling hand, and leading her to a low easy-chair; then, seating himself nearly opposite to her, he resumed: "I only want now to ask one or two questions. Do you mind telling me your present name?"

She strove to answer, but for a time her quivering lips seemed as though they would refuse their office. At length only a single word was audible.

"Milman."

"That before?—I mean your maiden name."

"Marion Lockhart Wilson."

"Exactly. I only wished to be sure of making no mistake."

The sad eyes of the poor frightened girl asked the question her tongue could not put: his motive in making these inquiries. North lost no time in replying to the glance more pathetic than words.

"I have a trust to fulfil; when I undertook it, I thought I should have been in England much earlier than has actually been the case, otherwise I should have endeavoured to attend to the matter by other means than a personal interview; I must express my regret for my delay. About twelve months ago I was up country, a long distance from Bombay, surveying in a wild and lonely district, when I was fetched one evening to see a sick person, an Englishman. Illness will do its work sharply in that climate; four-and-twenty hours will often see the beginning and the end, and I now found this unfortunate stranger at the point of death."

Mr. North paused; but he saw by Marion's face that the conclusion was half-divined.

"Go on," whispered she, the breath coming and going fast between her parted lips. "That person was?"

"Henry Milman."

North had almost expected her to faint or fall to weeping; but Marion did neither. Her head dropped back against the chair and she closed her eyes for a moment in silent thought or prayer.

"Did he suffer much?" she murmured at length.

"No doubt he had suffered great pain," answered North, ever straightforward and truthful whatever the temptation to the contrary might be. "But by the time I reached him he was fast lapsing into unconsciousness."

"Did he—did he speak at all about—religion?" she asked next, hesitatingly.

"I read him a psalm, and said a prayer at his desire."

"Had he no message to send to me?"

"The power of speech was beginning to leave him when I saw him; he took thought, you perceive, for the news of his death to reach you. He was but just able to give me the necessary names and one or two bare particulars, which I at once took down in writing. In this packet," continued North, placing in her hands a small sealed parcel, "you will find one or two articles, and the precise date of his death, place of burial and so forth. Be assured that everything was as thoroughly attended to as his friends could possibly desire," concluded the young man, without adding that it was of his care and at his expense that all this had been done for the destitute stranger.

She rose from her seat to leave the room. North attended her to the door and, opening it, waited for her to pass through; but before doing so Marion turned round, and her gratitude shining out through her wet eyes, she said simply and softly: "Thank you for your goodness to him, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I suspect your kindness was even more and greater than you have told me."

The next moment Talbot North was alone.

Before there was a chance of Miss Lockhart's being down the next morning, or of Mr. and Mrs. Montagu's return, Talbot North had left again. Mrs. Montagu was in despair at having missed her favourite brother's brief visit; but a letter which she received from himself a little later brought consolation, for it announced that he had abandoned the idea of returning to India, and was making arrangements for settling in England.

"He must have been offered a splendid appointment to alter his plans so greatly," said Mrs. Montagu, sagely.

And her husband was about to endorse this opinion, when he chanced to catch sight of Miss Lockhart's face, illumined with a tender roseate glow.

"There is the true cause of the change," said he to himself. "We are to have a wedding."

And Mr. Montagu was right both in his conclusions and in his prophecy.



MAISON MALOUNIE.

I.

"PRETTY? No; but gentille. Figure to yourself une blonde Mees; and hair, ah! a nymph, undulated, sparkling, golden, magnificent!"

"But not pretty?"

"Well, scarcely perhaps; but a voice! Ah! not a little filet de voix, but a voice like a silver bell—clear, sympathetic."

"Shall I like 'la blonde Mees'?"

"Like her, yes; love her, no: for she has no fortune."

So far I had heard—overheard; let me avow my dishonourable action. But I was "la blonde Mees," and it was too tempting an opportunity! The window was open; I was outside, lazily enjoying a dreamy siesta in the rose bower, when I heard the murmur of voices. My godmother was talking of me; and the deep, pleasant voice asking so many questions about my insignificant self was no other than her august nephew, the son of her only sister, who had married an Englishman—her favourite, Horace Vernon. "No fortune indeed," I repeated, softly, and then, clear as a bell, I struck up the old song:

"My face is my fortune, sir, she said,

Sir, she said, sir, she said."

Over and over again, with every variety of intonation, I sang the words. Suddenly I ceased. Instinctively I felt he was nearing the window and meditating a descent in search of the singer. Hastily I fled; fear lent wings to my feet; blindly I made a dash at the clipped yew hedge and its labyrinthine paths, when suddenly I stumbled, and should have fallen but for the arms hospitably outstretched to save me. Recovering myself quickly I drew back with hasty dignity and exclaimed in my best French, "Monsieur!"

He bowed. "Mademoiselle, are you hurt?" he said, managing to infuse much tender solicitude into the few words. Then, with a quick look at me, before I could answer, he added: "Let me introduce myself. I am Horace Vernon; and you must be Miss Eugénie Everard. I have been hearing all about you from my aunt."

I bowed and coloured vividly. "Yes! 'La blonde Mees,'" I could not help retorting, with a smile.

"Ah! you overheard us?" he cried, with a ludicrous expression of dismay.

Anger and the demon of coquetry prompted me there and then to take off my godmother, and I replied in her voice: "Like her, yes; love her, no: for she has no fortune."

The next moment I felt awkward and confused, for I had hardly realized the meaning of the words. Mr. Vernon laughed.

"Well," he said, "I promise."

"Promise what?"

"To like you."

He offered me a well-shaped brown hand, into which, after a moment's hesitation, I put my own. The fingers closed over it in a protecting clasp, and I could not but look up gratefully into the handsome sunburnt face and the merry blue eyes gazing down upon me, as I acknowledged the compact we were making.

Of course my readers will have already decided that I, Eugénie Everard, shall presently fall in love with Mr. Horace Vernon; that he will reciprocate the tender feeling, and thereby break his aunt's heart, and upset all her deeply-laid plans. But the clear-sighted reader does not know that I am turned nineteen and have passed those important years in the gay town of London, where I have left an inconsolable lover. A certain Reverend Robert Duncombe, whose betrothal ring I wear on the orthodox finger, and whose photograph I have duly set in a large golden locket, with the touching Greek words *A. E. I.* on one side, and an impossible monogram of *R. D. E. E.* in raised filigree work on the other.

Robert is of a saving nature, and has limited our correspondence to three times a week, but he never allows a day to pass without writing, and the budget when it does come is a daily journal of his uneventful life. He wished me to follow the same plan, but I am not of regular habits, and have declined to do more than reply to the folios as I receive them. So much for my side. On the other, there's a certain heiress with a very large dot (millions of francs) destined for Monsieur Horace. Bonne-maman particularly impressed this upon me when she told me she expected her nephew at Dinard. I have not long since arrived from England on a six months' visit to Bonne-maman, otherwise La Comtesse Eugénie Reine Marie d'Harcourt, my mother's old school friend, and my godmother. I was but a baby when I lost both my parents. After my father, Colonel Everard's, death, I lived with my uncle, but misfortune seemed to claim me as her own: my poor aunt died suddenly, and my uncle, broken-hearted, drifted back into an aimless state of bachelorhood. I felt a burden upon him. Eagerly he availed himself of Madame d'Harcourt's invitation to me, and promptly saw me off to Southampton, from whence I was shipped to St. Malo. There I was met by the Countess's man-of-all-work, Jean Pierre, and with him crossed over to Dinard, where Bonne-maman lived in a bright, cheerful white house, with green jalousies, standing in an old-fashioned garden, being near the beach and the lovely bay with its glittering sands of sparkling black granite. Madame d'Harcourt gave me a hearty welcome to Maison Malounie, and Perrine, the comely, black-haired, bright-eyed maid, stared at me approvingly, and admired my travelling garb of English alpaca as much as I did her wonderful lace cuffs, fixed on with gold pins, and her black silk bib apron over her neat stuff gown.

A month had passed rapidly, and I never wavered in my belief in my godmother until this fatal morning, when I experienced the truth of the old adage, and listening, had heard no good of myself. I was nothing, absolutely nothing, to Bonne-maman. All her heart was with the young man who had only just arrived from England, with whom she had been discussing me as a stranger. As if I should ever seek to win the affections of an engaged man! Moreover, am I not myself engaged? Shall I tell her, and make her quite comfortable? No; I resolve I will not do so, but let her feel, if ever so slightly, uneasy.

Yes, as we are both safe, I will make myself as fascinating as I can. Horace Vernon is to marry Mdlle. Berthe de Pontac, and I am to marry the Rev. Robert, so there can be no harm in a little flirtation, and I shall let things take their course.

II.

THINGS do take their course, and a very pleasant course it is. The days pass quickly, and I have no time to write letters. The Dinard bathing season will soon be at its height. The Parisian world, including Mdlle. Berthe de Pontac, will be here—so Bonne-maman tells me; Horace never mentions her. I often long to ask him about her, but a shy feeling closes my lips. Do I dread that her name should break the spell of happiness cast round my life?

Alas! after some weeks of delightful enjoyment, the spell was broken, and by Bonne-maman.

Horace had fired my imagination by a glowing account of fresh blackberries, the finest, blackest, sweetest that ever were seen. Working upon my enthusiasm, he promised to take me a blackberrying.

The next morning, in high glee, we sallied forth: he armed with a stout hooked stick, I with a basket. Past a cottage, with a bright-eyed maiden tending her pet lamb in the kitchen, while her mother was sitting at the spinning-wheel in the morning sun. Through lanes so narrow, we had to scramble up the steep bank to let the great white horses with the lumbering waggons go by. "Through bush, through briar" we went, and never a blackberry did I see. At last, I ventured to remark upon the singular fact of the flowers and buds being still in full bloom. I heard a slight chuckle, and looking up at my companion's face, saw a mild gleam of fun on it. "Well, you must indeed be a cockney born, to think of expecting blackberries in August." For a moment I was put out, then joining in his merriment I contented myself with the wreath of wild flowers he had gathered.

From this merry excursion we returned in high glee and good humour, my basket laden with flowers, my hat decorated with berries and brightly tinted leaves. Bonne-maman, contrary to her usual hospitality, did not ask Horace to stay, and he went off there and then to his hotel. Then, having removed my protector, I was

treated to a long lecture on my reckless disregard of the proprieties. Were these English manners or rather the want of them? This running about the country with young men for untold hours, this liberty, was unheard of in France, and I must, at least, while under her roof, conform to French usages; unmarried girls could not be too particular.

Conscience stricken, I could find no words of excuse. The hot blood dyed my face, unshed tears made my eyes burn. Stooping, I kissed Bonne-maman in silence, and stepping through the open window into the garden I wandered away out of sight. Yes; I had been unmaidenly, immodest, undignified. Dishonourable, too, forgetting my plighted troth. If only Bonne-maman and Mr. Vernon knew, how they would despise me. Heartsick, I turned away from the garden and sought the solitude of the orchard. There, alone, under the shadowy trees, I could think it out. My eyes ached; my head burned; I was humbled to the dust, to have failed when I felt so sure of myself! Playing with fire, how could I escape? And he—never in words had he confessed his love, but, by a thousand trifles light as air, I felt he loved me. And Berthe? Ah! I thought bitterly, he may like me but he will marry her. Will he love her? I threw myself on the soft cool grass, hiding my face with my hands, and trying to shut out the pain, the sorrow, and the shame, heedless of time and the passing hours.

Suddenly a hand was placed on mine, and I started up. As I did so, my chain caught, the links broke, and my locket fell open at Horace's feet. Before closing and returning it, he said, "May I?" and looking at the portrait, remarked, "Your father's likeness?"

I shook my head, and, pointing to the pearl ring I wore, said bravely: "No! I am engaged."

"Engaged!" His voice was husky. "Then you have been amusing yourself—flirting, to keep your hand in?" And without another word, but with the most hopeless expression I ever saw, he threw the locket down and left me.

I tottered to my feet. I was avenged—he would despise me as a flirt, but he could not accuse me of giving my love unasked, or forcing it upon a man who was not free. If he were engaged, why, so was I. We were quits.

With trembling hands I drew off the fatal ring, and going to my room laid it with the locket and addressed the parcel to the Rev. Robert Duncombe, and straightway wrote and asked for my freedom. I could bear the thrall no more. I must be free. I wrote kindly, feeling dimly the pain I was inflicting; but at all risks I must be free.

III.

HORACE was staying at Dinan. The Baroness de Pontac and her daughter had arrived, and called on Mme. d'Harcourt. Of course, on Horace's return he would be dancing attendance upon his fiancée.

Robert had written. I was too depressed to feel wounded at the tone of his reply, or might have resented his agreeing with me on the desirability of breaking off the engagement. In a postscript he added that he had the promise of the vicarage of Capel-le-Ferne, and its £1,500 a-year; and I came to the conclusion that his joy at his worldly advancement had taken away the sting from his heart's adversity. I was thankful that it was so. The morning was clear and bright, and a swim in the sea was a tempting remedy to drown dull care, so I strolled down leisurely to the beach. I was late, and when I emerged from my "cabane" found a crowd of gossiping idlers in possession of every chair and available seat. Not a nook or corner but was filled with gay couples, working, chattering, smoking, and "frivolling."

Classically draped in my white wrapper, my hair piled up on high, undisfigured with the oilskin cap the French ladies affected, I hurriedly walked through the criticising audience, and leaving my mantle in Perrine's care, was soon disporting myself in the crisp sunny waves. After a longer swim than usual I waded out a dripping Niobe. I looked for Perrine and my wrapper—in vain; she was nowhere to be seen. After a momentary hesitation I prepared to run the gauntlet of the assembled multitude and make a quick rush at my sheltering cabane.

With a sudden inspiration, I unloosed my long hair and let its shining golden glory fall around my costume, thereby trying to feel a little less abject, and so made my way through the "mob," as I spitefully called the loungers surrounding the cabanes. With a ludicrous sense of humiliation and flaming cheeks, I saw Horace in lively conversation with a Parisian elegante, exactly in front of my haven of refuge. I made a frantic dart at the canvas door, to be greeted with the sight of an unmistakable pair of manly boots. I turned and fled—oh! miserie! in my confusion I had forgotten the number. I must pass them, vaguely wondering if beach etiquette expected me to acknowledge Horace. I prepared for another dash—when a lady obligingly pointed out a canvas tent with a polite "c'est là, mademoiselle," and I rushed in to hide my blushes under the friendly canvas. On my return, Bonne-maman told me she expected the Baroness de Pontac and her daughter and Horace.

Although I was broken-hearted, vanity was not dead; I determined to look my best. I gathered my hair in a knot, and placed among the wavy fringe of curls some gorgeous crimson tinnias. I half feared a rebuke from Bonne-maman as to being overdressed—so slipped on a black silk gown, wherein I had artfully inserted a white lace tucker and shiny jet-embroidered ruffles; another cluster of scarlet tinnias and black mittens finished off the severe and becoming costume, in which I entered the room prepared to make the acquaintance of the hateful de Pontacs.

Mdlle. Berthe only was there, arrayed in fashionable attire, and I

was scarcely surprised to recognise in her Horace's lively companion of the morning. Horace behaved beautifully in Bonne-maman's eyes. After greeting me coldly, he overlooked my insignificant presence, lost in the overpowering brilliancy of the sparkling and amusing Berthe. She absorbed him entirely. They were making arrangements for a trip to Mont St. Michel, where he and I had talked of going. How wretched I felt, how wild with the scraps I heard: "Train from St. Malo—carriage at Dol, on to the Hospice." I must make a diversion, and somewhat abruptly asked Mdlle. de Pontac to play or sing. In vain Bonne-maman objected that it was getting dusk and she did not want lights, as it rested her eyes. Mdlle. Berthe, gracefully shaking out her puffs and laces, sweetly observed she would play for Mme. d'Harcourt, and sing for Mademoiselle.

She rattled through a noisy and brilliant piece, and then her voice, sharp and metallic, filled the air: "*Si vous n'avez rien à me dire.*" She was singing it at Horace, who, apparently buried in thought, was sitting near her. I wondered if he remembered it as one of the songs I had often sung to him. Bonne-maman coughed and fidgeted and shivered; Mdlle. Berthe bravely sang on, sometimes flat, sometimes sharp, finishing at last on a note that jarred every nerve and fibre.

Horace was profuse in thanks, and I, too, thanked her, and added immediately, "Shall I sing you a little English ballad?" Bonne-maman interrupted me to order the lamp, but I maliciously remarked that I would sing a twilight song first. I could not resist my anticipated triumph. Straight from my heart the words rang out, "*In the Gloaming,*" and vibrating strangely through the dusk came the farewell to my love, mine no longer—"Best for you and best for me."

I must have sung better than usual, from the deep silence paid as tribute to my talent, and under cover of the darkness I rose, and stealing silently to the door, sought the friendly night wherein to hide my sorrow. Perrine met me with the lamp, and leaving the hateful light and the happy circle I turned away to the garden.

IV.

HURRIEDLY I went, past the clipped yew hedge, to the stone seat, on which I sank, and burying my face in my hands burst into passionate tears. I was young, and this my first sorrow seemed too great a burthen. I heard footsteps, and shrinking back into the shadow of the hedge, waited breathlessly. They were passing, when the treacherous moon shone out and bathed me in a flood of silvery light. A hand was kindly laid upon my head. There, in all the glory of his six-foot stature, in the white shining moonlight, stood Horace, looking down with kind and pitying eyes upon the tear-stained face uplifted to him; and in the winning voice of old I heard my name.

"Eugénie, what is it?"

"Nothing," I murmured.

He bent to hear my trembling answer.

"Nothing that I can do?"

"Nothing that I can undo," I replied.

Lower and lower he bent, and nearer and nearer, in dangerous proximity, had it not been for Berthe. Her shadow was between us. Tenderly taking my cold hands in his, he stroked them gently. Suddenly he gave a start.

"Where is it?" and he passed his fingers lightly over mine.

"It?" I inquired.

"Your ring. You should wear it always, or a fellow may be tempted to forget himself."

"And you," I replied; "you, too, should wear a ring. French husbands often do, and you should do in Rome as the Romans' do."

"But I am only half French," he laughed, "and I might marry an English girl; then I need not wear a ring."

"Berthe de Pontac is very French," I returned.

"Mdlle. de Pontac! Eugénie, I am too proud to marry a woman with money."

"And too poor to marry one without," I sadly retorted.

The words slipped out, and before I could cough them down I was in his arms and smothered with kisses. Ere I could realise my happiness a discreet cough sounded from the path, and we started apart to see Perrine slowly advancing.

"How touching of her to warn us," said Horace. "A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind; she's setting her cap at Pierre."

"Her cap!" I laughed merrily; "and such a cap!"

Monsieur was wanted to escort Mdlle. Berthe, and Madame wanted Mademoiselle.

I could not see Bonne-maman. I trembled guiltily at the thought. With a whispered "Till to-morrow," we parted—Horace to convoy Mdlle. Berthe to her lordly château, I through the kitchen to my bower. I hastily undressed and sought my couch. Half an hour later, when Bonne-maman softly entered on tip-toe, I pretended to be asleep. Even then I feared she must read my secret on my face. She turned away with a little sigh, and I felt a terrible humbug. My intense happiness frightened me, and in vain I tried to sleep. At last, towards morning, I fell into a doze, from which I awoke with a feeling of coming evil.

V.

THE feeling was verified. The next morning Bonne-maman was too ill to rise. I sat near her, and after a while she murmured in a feeble voice, "Eugénie, my child, I should like you to stay with me; always, if your uncle will not object. When Horace is married

I shall be very lonely. Will you stay, dear, until you, too, marry and leave the old woman?"

The blood flamed in my cheeks; I stooped and kissed her fondly.

"I will not leave you, Bonne-maman, unless—unless you send me away."

While I was speaking, the doctor came. Alas, my dread forebodings were realized! Bonne-maman was indeed ill, stricken with typhus fever.

And so my dream ended. I looked my last upon Horace. He was obliged to leave for England, and the doctor was to telegraph him bulletins of Madame d'Harcourt's health. In vain he urged me to let the sister-of-charity take my place beside her. I was firm. A duty was before me—clear and distinct: I was needed by the kind old lady who had befriended me and offered me a home. True to the old friend, if it must be, I must risk losing the young friend, the more than friend. I do not deny that it was a struggle between duty and inclination, but she needed me, and he—well, "he loved and he rode away."

Days grew into weeks, weeks lengthened into months; Bonne-maman varied, now better, now worse. At last my patience was crowned with success, my love won her back from the arms of death.

She owed her life to my nursing. The yellow flag was still flying, and we were not out of quarantine, when Perrine, with her face shining like a beneficent sunbeam, importantly announced "a visit."

It was a bright spring morning, and as the visitor was in the sitting-room, I decided upon holding a parley from the garden, thus averting any danger of lingering infection. Throwing a scarf round my head, I stood before the closed window and tapped lightly; instantly it flew open and I was clasped in the arms of my stalwart lover.

He laughed my fear of infection to scorn, suggested a warm climate for Bonne-maman, a month or two at Cannes—and as I also needed a thorough rest, he proposed changing Miss Eugénie Everard into Mrs. Horace Vernon.

I think Perrine must have put Bonne-maman up to a thing or two. She was not surprised to hear the news, and I was considerably relieved to find her own. "She was glad her one darling was to marry her other darling."



A STORY FROM CABUL.

Just a handful of Sikhs, and an Englishman at their head :
 But the enemy swarmed by scores, an endless, pitiless mass,
 So, "Draw swords and charge!" the very last words he said,
 And the handful, a handful less, broke down the mountain pass.

His troopers held him up, with a bullet hole in his breast,
 And they laid him under a rock; there was no time to spare—
 Into Sherpore by gunfire, that was the chance for the rest,
 To ride for fifteen miles with the enemy's shot in the air!

Scarcely more than a boy, they laid him dead on the rock :
 Never a kiss, nor a holy word, nor a tear to hallow the place,
 For the foe were rallying behind from the sudden shock;
 Only they crossed his arms on his breast, and covered his face.

But the grey horse he had ridden stood close at the master's side—
 Bridle, nor spur, nor word of command, he heeded them not.
 Into Sherpore by gunfire, and fifteen miles to ride;
 So they were bound to press on, and leave him guarding the spot.

Into Sherpore by gunfire: they did it, the brave little band,
 And told the sorrowful tale of the charge that the Captain led.
 Had we laid him to rest in the stateliest church of his land,
 We had not mourned more deeply, more truly, our friend that was dead.

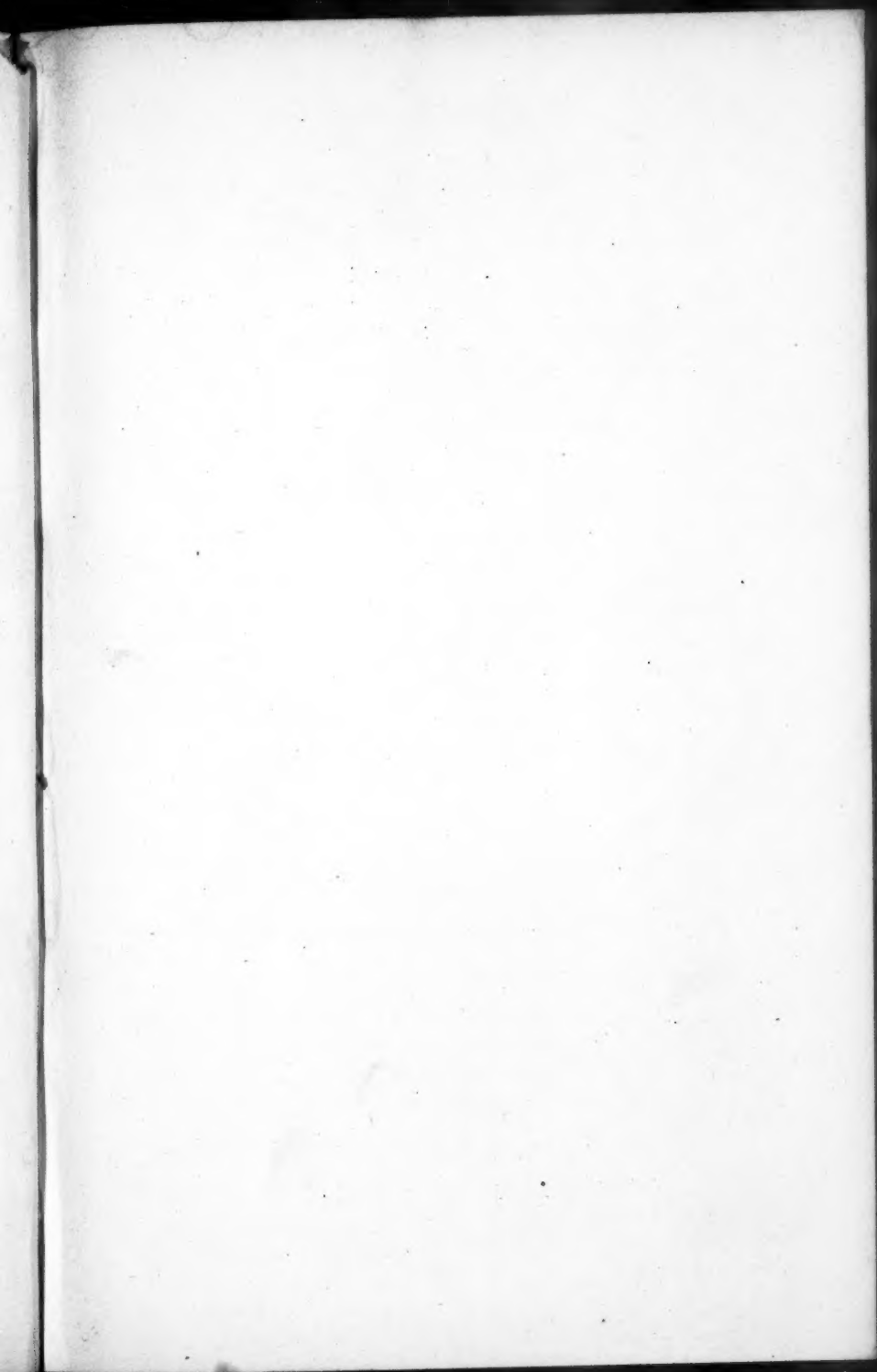
That was a night of alarms; the enemy showed in force,
 So we doubled our guard at the gates and waited the first attack,
 And just before morning, sounded the nearing steps of a horse.
 "Who comes there?" cried the sentry, and got no answer back.

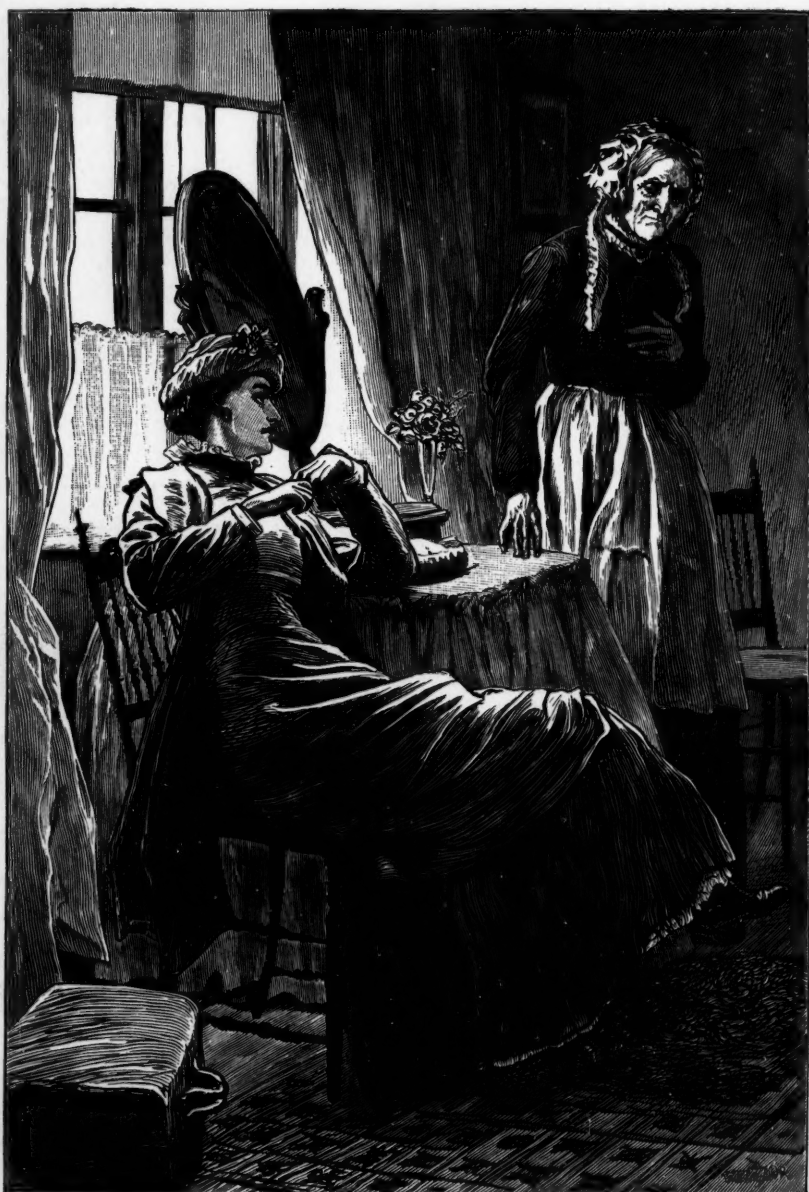
"Click!" went the carbine, "Fire!" and the steps were still :
 Silently something fell in the dark, with the fall that is dead,
 And when the morning light struggled over the crest of the hill,
 There lay the Captain's grey charger, "Favorite," shot through the head.

Was it lone on the hillside, and did he seek our aid ?
 How can we tell what stirrings of love were strong in the beast ?
 He had fed from the master's hand; and it seemed that his grief essayed,
 In this dim, dumb way, to bring us the last sad news, at least.

He who fired the shot had often groomed him and fed—
 One of the Captain's troop: an ignorant fellow, of course;
 So he primed the carbine again, and put the charge thro' his head.
 Strange, how the stirrings of love worked both in man and horse!

G. B. STUART.





ROBERT BARNES.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"IT'S NO FIT TASK FOR A POOR OLD BODY LIKE ME," SAID CHARITY.